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AN
EXPOSITION

OF THE

HISTORICAL WRITINGS

OF THE

NEW TESTAMENT,

WITH REFLECTIONS SUBJOINED TO EACH SECTION,

BY THE LATE

✓
REV. TIMOTHY KENRICK.

WITH A

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

FROM THE SECOND LONDON OCTAVO EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.

BOSTON :
MUNROE AND FRANCIS, 123 WASHINGTON-STREET,
CORNER OF WATER-STREET.

—
1828.

PREFACE

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

At an interval of seventeen years from its first appearance, a new edition of this work is offered to the public. Those who have used it in their private study of the Scriptures, or the religious instruction of their families, have borne uniform testimony to its clearness as a guide in the interpretation of the New Testament, and to the piety, simplicity, and energy, with which the hopes and duties of the Christian are illustrated and enforced in the practical reflections.

When this new edition was originally projected, it was intended to add Notes ; but this plan having been abandoned for want of adequate encouragement, the present work will be found to vary only by some verbal alterations and occasional difference of arrangement, from the first edition. Nothing has been added

by the Editor, except the commentary on the introductory verses of the gospel of Luke, which the Author had accidentally passed over.

It has been alleged, by some of those who have used the Exposition in their families, that many of the sections are too long to be read at once. In the present edition an attempt has been made to remedy this inconvenience, by subdivision, where it could be effected, without separating parts which are closely connected. Where the commentary and the reflections are still found too long to be read together, the best method would perhaps be, to read the text and commentary on one occasion of domestic worship ; and to repeat the text *without* commentary, followed by reflections, on the next. In this way, the continuity of the narrative, which is apt to be interrupted by the interposition of notes, will be restored, and the reflections will be heard in immediate connexion with the passage of Scripture on which they are founded.

York, May 18, 1824.

PREFACE

TO THE

FIRST EDITION.

THE posthumous Work now offered to the public, has been printed at the request and expense of the united congregations of Protestant Dissenters in Exeter, of whom the author was, for more than twenty years, one of the ministers : its contents were delivered by him from the pulpit ; and they have been carefully transcribed from his short-hand copy.

In laying it before the world, the editor is anxiously desirous of exhibiting it in that state of accuracy in which it would have appeared, had his much-regretted friend himself prepared it for the press. With this view, he has not scrupled to make those verbal alterations which he judged to be necessary ; though none of them are of material importance ; and though the writer's characteristic style is every where preserved. He has also erased a few repetitions, which he conceived to be superfluous, and has uniformly revised the references, and occasionally added to them. Where it was thought desirable to quote authorities to

which the Author had not recourse, or concerning which he is, from other causes, silent, notes have been introduced at the bottom of the page, and are distinguished as the editor's.

He has ventured upon only one correction of a higher kind. It was formerly the opinion of Mr. Kenrick, that the Christian Scriptures describe persons who leave the present world in a condition of unrepented guilt, as doomed to future annihilation ; agreeably to which idea, he explained those passages in the historical books of the New Testament, that speak of the punishment of the wicked in another state. But, during the last years of his life, it was his persuasion, that this sentiment is unsupported by any declarations either of Jesus Christ or of his apostles ; and he thought, in common with many excellent and learned men, that even the intensest sufferings of the transgressor will be corrective and remedial, and issue, finally, in universal order, happiness, and virtue. To discuss the arguments in behalf of this tenet, or those against it, is not the province of the editor, who, indeed, does not consider himself as responsible for the truth or falsehood of any of the positions, or for the soundness or fallacy of any of the reasonings, occurring in this work. Yet, in his own judgment, he would have ill discharged his duty to the author, and to the public, had he permitted the following pages to represent Mr. Kenrick as holding a doctrine which his friends and hearers knew that he had discarded.

It will be perceived, that the Author has given no exposition of the accounts, contained in the respective histories of Matthew and Luke, of the miraculous

birth of Jesus Christ. The reason is, that, with the exception of the preface to Luke's gospel, he did not look upon the chapters in question, as the productions of those evangelists, but as fabrications by an unknown, though early, hand. For this sentiment, he thought that he was in possession of sufficient evidence, which he principally derived from the publications that are cited in the note below.*

For the purpose of rendering this Exposition more useful to the reader, indexes have been added to it ; together with two chronological tables, the former of which is framed upon the hypothesis adopted by the author, respecting the duration of our Lord's ministry. By the insertion of this table, however, the editor must not be understood as even intimating his own opinion with regard to the merits of the controversy between Dr. Priestley and the late Archbishop of Armagh ; his single object being to illustrate the author's exposition in the manner which, he is assured, would have been most consonant with the author's wishes.

Of the diligence and ability of Mr. Kenrick as an interpreter of the Scriptures ; of his happy art of deducing from them, with simplicity and effect, the most instructive lessons ; of the manly freedom with which he thought for himself ; of his strong attachment to what he considered as divine truth, and of his earnest desire to promote the devout and benevolent, the pure

* Priestley's History of Early Opinions, &c., Vol. IV. p. 1—169. Evanson's Dissonance, &c. (first edition,) p. 32—55. 118—129. Jones's Developement, &c., Vol. I. p. 329—408. 482—.

and heavenly spirit of the uncorrupted religion of Jesus Christ, this work, it is presumed, will be a standing and acceptable memorial : and there is reason to hope, that it will be found of eminent advantage to the pious and reflecting Christian, in his moments of retirement, to heads of families at the seasons of domestic worship, and to students and ministers, in their endeavours to understand the last and most valuable revelation of their Maker's will, and to feel, as well as to diffuse, the efficacy and consolations of religion.

JOHN KENTISH.

Birmingham, June 27, 1807.

MEMOIR.

AS some account of the author of the following Exposition, may gratify and instruct the reader, it has been judged proper to prefix a memorial of his life and character.

TIMOTHY KENRICK was born January 26th, 1759, at Wynn Hall, in the parish of Ruabon, in Denbighshire, and received his grammar learning at a private school in Wrexham. As his parents, with wisdom and affection which have secured honour to their memories, cherished his early love of knowledge and his susceptibility of religious impressions, he soon discovered a predilection for the Christian ministry, as exercised among Protestant Dissenters; an office which had been sustained with eminent credit and usefulness by his paternal grandfather.*

In his sixteenth year he became a pupil in the dissenting academy at Daventry, then under the care of the Rev. Dr. Ashworth, and shortly afterwards, of the Rev. Thomas Robins. Here he pursued his studies with signal reputation and advantage; being distinguished by the excellence of his temper, the correctness of his judgment, the diligence of his application, and the extent and solidity of his attainments. From the first he seems to have cultivated a habit of devotion with singular assiduity; making himself master of a rich variety of scriptural expressions, for the purpose of introducing them into his prayers in the family and in public;—a practice in which he was remarked for considerable propriety of selection.

* The Rev. John Kenrick, at Wrexham.

It was a proof of the high sense entertained of his acquirements and virtues, that he was chosen an assistant-tutor in the academy before he had completed his own course of study, and was further appointed to read lectures, during one year, for Mr. Robins, who then laboured under the bodily indisposition which occasioned him, soon afterwards, to resign the offices of divinity-tutor and superintendent of the family. On the election of the Rev. Thomas Belsham to these stations, Mr. Kenrick continued his services, first as classical, and next as mathematical tutor; and by his punctuality, zeal, and accuracy, united with great firmness of purpose and a mild and happy manner of reproof, he gained, in an uncommon degree, the attachment of his pupils. Having the stated exercise of his profession, however, still in view, he was soon called to another sphere of duty.

The Rev. Micajah Towgood—a name ever dear to the cause of Christian piety and virtue, and of religious freedom—had retired in 1782 from the co-pastorship of the two united congregations of Dissenters in Exeter, after the labours of more than sixty years in the ministry of the gospel. This vacancy Mr. Kenrick was invited to fill; and his relation to the societies who had made a choice thus honourable to their discernment, commenced with the beginning of 1784. In the summer of the following year he was ordained at Exeter. Upon this occasion, he delivered a statement of his religious belief, which, at that time, was far from being directly opposed to the received opinions. One subject certainly which he afterwards viewed in a different light, was the propriety of ordination itself, as it is usually observed among Dissenters. Not that he disapproved of a religious service in order to introduce the connexion between a pastor and his flock: for in such a service he was himself to have engaged in the autumn of 1804, had not his death intervened. He was persuaded, however, that unscriptural sentiments of the positive institutions of the gospel, are considerably promoted by the custom of ministers not being permitted to celebrate baptism and the Lord's supper previously to the ceremony denominated ordination.

A candid and accurate observer of mankind* remarks: "I have had occasion to see and to lament, among several of my early acquaintance, the very unhappy effects that have arisen from their

* Dr. Kippis's Charge at Bridport, July 1783, pp. 1, 7.

trusting too much to the stock of wisdom, science, and learning, which they had gained in the course of an academical education. Hence some, who promised well in the opening of life, have sadly disappointed the public expectation, and failed of reputation and usefulness.—It is only the foundation of knowledge which can be laid at the seminaries of literature.” Of the truth and importance of this declaration, Mr. Kenrick was fully sensible ; and so far was he, when he quitted the academy, from ceasing to be a student, that, much as his proficiency surpassed his years, he still applied himself with extraordinary diligence to the acquisition of knowledge as well as to the communication of it, and especially to that of theological knowledge. Much of his time was employed in preparing his compositions for the pulpit : much in discharging the less public duties of the pastoral relation ; and it was also his object to qualify himself, in a greater degree, for two branches of ministerial service which, in general, are either not cultivated at all, or not cultivated with the zeal, judgment, and perseverance which they well deserve ;—the exposition of the Scriptures, and the religious instruction of the young.

He now entered on a more critical examination of the New Testament in the original language ; with only the occasional help of some of the most judicious and approved commentators. To this direction of his studies were owing the expository lectures on the historical books of the Christian covenant, which he delivered more than once to his congregation ; and to this he was indebted, under Providence, for a happy change in his sentiments of Christian doctrine.

Some of the first religious impressions on the mind of Mr. Kenrick, were accompanied by his admission of the tenets inculcated in the assembly’s catechism : for although it does not appear that this celebrated formulary of belief was put into his hands, yet he had acquired from other quarters its unscriptural views of the divine character and government. One of his favourite books in early life was Dr. Doddridge’s “ Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul.” This treatise, with many claims on approbation, justly incurs the accusation of describing religious excellence as a certain train and state of the affections, rather than as a principle and habit. So powerful was its influence on Mr. Kenrick, that, agreeably to a direction and a form contained in it, he drew up and subscribed

a solemn act of self-dedication to a holy life. But, while he gave this proof of the devout and serious temper by which he was always characterised, his feelings were overcast by a gloom bordering on that despair which Dr. Priestley likewise, as we learn from his *Memoirs*, experienced in his youth, and which proceeded from the same or nearly the same cause. It was then the practice of Mr. Kenrick to regard God as the arbitrary sovereign of the human race, and not as their gracious Father : he was then perplexed as to the proper object of his worship, and had a constant fear of incurring the displeasure of one of the Persons in the Trinity, by presenting his addresses to another of them. At a subsequent period, he frequently contrasted with gratitude, the doubts and the despondency of his former days, with the serenity and joy arising from his belief in the pure religion of the gospel.

It reflects distinguished honour on the gentlemen who superintended in succession the academy at Daventry, that they did not impose restraints on freedom of inquiry, but encouraged and assisted their pupils in the exercise of private judgment, which they represented in the light of a duty as well as of a privilege. The seminary, over which they presided, had hence a fair title to the distinction of a Protestant seminary ; and Mr. Kenrick's diligent attendance on the theological lectures of the house, concurred with his talents and dispositions in enabling him to form some opinion for himself upon points of religious controversy. From the best information which can be obtained, it appears probable, that at the time of his removal to Exeter, his views of the Trinity were those that had been taken by Dr. S. Clarke, and that his creed, in respect to other articles, now approached more nearly to the doctrines of Arminius than to those of Calvin.

A different and better method of studying theology led, as was natural, to a different result. The text-book, employed by the divinity-tutors at Daventry, was Doddridge's *Lectures*, the arrangement of which is singularly unfavourable to the impartial discussion of controverted opinions, and to the acquisition of religious truth. Without the possibility of containing the substance of mathematical demonstration, they present, like the lectures of Mr. Jennings,* from which they are in part taken, the empty form of it ; popular and reputedly orthodox tenets being treated on as lead-

* The Rev. John Jennings of Hinckley, tutor of Dr. Doddridge.

ing propositions, and honoured with at least the semblance of regular proof ; while a scholium or lemma is deemed sufficient for sentiments which vary from them, or to which they are opposed. When divinity is thus taught from human systems, it becomes an object of secondary consideration to ascertain the sense of the sacred writings ; and the student's mind is prepossessed with theories, instead of being assisted in attaining the end of his researches. Nor had Mr. Kenrick been long at Exeter before he was convinced of the evils of this method of instruction, however modified, and of the necessity of deriving Christian truth from the unpolluted fountain of the Scriptures.

In the course of his investigation he gained a persuasion, which gradually increased in strength, that Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, is neither God equal with the Father, nor a pre-existent and superangelic being, but simply of the human race, though highly distinguished by the Deity, beyond former messengers and prophets. Hence he regarded the doctrine of the gospel as more simple indeed than he had hitherto considered it, but at the same time as proportionably more credible and useful. On other important articles in dispute among the professors of Christianity, he also disclosed, about this period, a change in his opinions. In these pages, however, it is the less necessary to state his religious sentiments at length, as they are fully represented in two posthumous volumes of his sermons, and in his exposition of the historical parts of the Christian Scriptures. To conceal or disguise his views of divine truth from the societies whom he served, was not the disposition of Mr. Kenrick : if to some persons they were obnoxious, and unpopular in the eyes of others, he had not so learned Christ, as to shrink, on these accounts, from avowing them ; but, as became a consistent Protestant, he manifested a fervent, well regulated, and enlightened zeal for their diffusion. In the event, many members of his congregation embraced them from rational conviction, notwithstanding their warm attachment to the name, character, and memory of their late venerable pastor, whose creed approached more nearly to the standard of imagined orthodoxy. Such was the energy of truth :—such the consequence of the blessing of Heaven upon the assiduity and faithfulness of the preacher, and the ingenuousness* of the hearers !

* Acts xvii. 11, 12.

At the half-yearly assembly of the Protestant Dissenting ministers of Devon and Cornwall, at Exeter, May 7, 1788, Mr. Kenrick delivered a discourse, which, at the request of the respectable body of men to whom it was principally addressed, he afterwards made public : it is entitled, “ An Inquiry into the best method of communicating religious knowledge to young men ;” and the preacher soon began to carry into effect, within the circle of his own connexions, those plans of systematic and regular instruction, the necessity and importance of which he had ably illustrated in his sermon. The assistance and patronage which he experienced in these efforts for the advantage of the rising generation, his own words will clearly describe. Speaking of the interval between May 1788, and November 1794, of two courses of lectures, which he had delivered, within that time, upon the plan stated in his discourse, and of the concurrence of Mr. Manning, one of his colleagues, with him in these views and labours he adds,*

“ The good effects which I have seen to arise from these few trials have confirmed me in the persuasion I before entertained, that it is the most convenient and efficacious method of communicating the fundamental principles of religion to that class of persons for whose use it was intended ; and encourage me to pursue it.”

Nor can we be surprised that he met with progressive countenance in this beneficial undertaking. Diligent, punctual, familiar, and perspicuous as a lecturer, he secured the attention and esteem of his classes, and was essentially instrumental to their improvement in the knowledge and spirit of religion. By means of his influence and exertions, a congregational library was provided for their use ; and they constantly gave proofs of their attachment and gratitude to their affectionate instructor. Of the materials and reasonings of some of his lectures, a judgment may be formed from a few of them which have a place in the second volume of his Discourses.†

Early in 1792 he published a sermon which had been delivered on the preceding fifth of November, and which he entitled, “ The Spirit of Persecutors Exemplified : and the conduct to be observed towards their descendants.” This subject and his application of it had evidently been suggested to him by those memorials of big-

* Preface to Address to Young Men, &c. p. 4.

† Nos. xxvii. xxxiv.

otry and intolerance which he had recently perceived at Birmingham. Accordingly, in the preface he makes some just and animated strictures on the riots which have fixed upon the name of that town an almost indelible disgrace: and in the discourse itself, he paints the guilt and evils of persecution, in lively, but faithful colours. Some extracts* from this sermon, which has now become scarce, will enable the reader to judge concerning its reasoning and spirit.

“In what manner,” asks our author, “are we to act towards those who practise or encourage persecution,—who are guilty of calumny, robbery, murder, and of every species of cruelty, or instigate others to these actions, under pretence of serving the interests of religion? Shall we praise their conduct as deserving the name of a becoming zeal for God? This would be to make ourselves partners in their guilt. To be silent only in such a case is to be criminal.—To suffer men to be guilty of all kinds of violence, without public censure, through fear of incurring their displeasure, is to abandon the world to the uncontrolled tyranny of the wicked, for the sake of our own personal security. It is they who practise, not they who condemn, persecution, who are to be regarded as the disturbers of the public peace: the exertions of the latter are the effort of virtue against vice, of justice against oppression, of a generous philanthropy in behalf of the rights and happiness of the human race, in opposition to those who have leagued together to destroy them. Such endeavours deserve to be commended and encouraged by all the friends of peace, virtue, and religion.—We cannot be too watchful in guarding mankind against the odious spirit of persecution, nor express ourselves too strongly of its evil tendency. Those who regard it as a light evil, undeserving of notice, are utter strangers to the history of the Christian church. The genius of persecution is a savage monster, that has devoured millions of the human race; if but the print of his feet is seen again it is time to sound the alarm, and to call upon all who value the peace of society, and the credit of the Christian religion, to unite their endeavours for his destruction; and blessed is that hand which God shall furnish with strength to give him a deadly wound. To behold his ravages upon others with unconcern, and not to attempt to stop them, lest we should irritate him to attack

* P. 22. &c.

ourselves, discovers a degree of timidity and weakness which is not only highly dishonourable, but which may likewise prove fatal to us, and become the cause of those evils we are endeavouring to avert ; for as this monster possesses not a very discerning spirit, if he be suffered to roam without molestation, he may at length vent his fury upon those who have studied to avoid provocation by the most pusillanimous submission."

The following sentiments are not only extremely just and important in themselves, but strikingly applicable to the state of things at the present crisis.

"Our next inquiry is how we ought to behave towards the Roman Catholics of the present day. Not, surely, by inflicting upon them the evils which their ancestors occasioned : By injuring them in their persons or property, or depriving them of any of their civil rights : That would be to return evil for evil, which the precepts of the Christian religion prohibit. Guilt is a personal thing, which cannot be transferred from one to another. Every one is answerable for his own offences alone, and not for the offences of those over whom he has no influence, whether they be his ancestors or descendants. For this reason, all those laws which render any class of citizens subject to severe penalties from one generation to another, for the crimes of their predecessors, are unjust : since they proceed upon this principle, that the sentiments and dispositions of the mind are hereditary, descending from father to son, and that they must remain unchangeable in every succession of men ; a supposition which is evidently contradicted both by experience and observation. Where individuals or a body of people have been guilty of any crime, let them be punished for it ; but let not that punishment extend to their children, who may be entirely innocent. The propriety of this limitation is rendered evident in the case of the Roman Catholics of this kingdom, who now renounce many of the principles, and condemn the persecuting conduct, of their ancestors. But were they still to retain the principles of their forefathers, and to believe it to be their duty, whenever they had opportunity, to oppress and injure those who differ from them in religious sentiments, no other restraint upon them would be necessary than to deprive them of the power of doing mischief, by carrying their principles into effect. To do any thing farther than this, would be to punish them for their opinions,

which are not in their own power, and come not within the jurisdiction of any human tribunal. They are the actions of men, and not their sentiments, political or religious, which are the proper objects of civil laws. Wherever the state assumes to itself an authority to examine into the private creed of its members, and to grant or withhold civil privileges, according to the ideas which may be formed of their good or evil tendency, it goes out of its province, and opens a wide door to injustice and oppression : for every one thinks his own opinions safe, and those of the persons who differ from him dangerous.

“Against granting the free exercise of their religion to Roman Catholics, it has been alleged, that they not only profess subjection to a foreign prince, the Pope, and acknowledge his authority to absolve them from their allegiance, and from every other obligation by which they may be bound to obey the supreme power in this country, but likewise that they have been in the habit of acting upon this principle.

“To this it may be answered, that whenever Papists have thus offended, the whole force of the law ought to have been directed against the delinquents : but that if the Roman Catholics of the present day renounce all subjection to the Pope of Rome in civil concerns ; if they deny his authority to absolve them from any moral obligation, and are ready to give the same security for their peaceable behaviour as is required from other subjects ; no good reason can be assigned why they should not enjoy equal privileges. That they hold many corrupt and absurd religious tenets, cannot affect their claim to any civil right.”

“—the law lately passed in their favour, repealing former sanguinary laws, and placing them nearly upon the same footing as the Protestant Dissenters, in respect to the exercise of their religion, was a just and equitable measure : the only thing to be lamented, is, that the relief granted did not extend so far as the rights of conscience and the principles of universal liberty required.”

The steady and well-directed zeal of Mr. Kenrick prompted him in the same year to devise and attempt the establishment of an

Unitarian Book Society, in the West of England, upon the plan of one which had been instituted some months before in the metropolis. Convinced of the desirableness of a provincial association for the like purposes, he exerted himself in recommending it to his friends, took an active part in framing the rules of it, drew up the simple and perspicuous statement which stands at the head of them, and, to his death, discharged the office of its secretary with the utmost vigilance and punctuality. It was no trifling satisfaction to him that he witnessed the gradual enlargement of the catalogue of its members from small and apparently unfavorable beginnings. The Western Unitarian Society has flourished amidst opposition which has not always been manly, generous, and consistent; and the persevering labours of Mr. Kenrick were principally instrumental to its success: for having once put his hand to the plough, he was not accustomed to look back. Great benefit has also been found to accrue to the institution from the custom of holding its annual meetings in different towns of the Western counties, and of joining, upon these occasions, in a religious service.

On the second anniversary of this institution, September 3, 1793, Mr. Kenrick delivered a sermon,* at Taunton, which, a few months afterward, was committed to the press, and the object of which is to show, that the period is probably arrived for the revival and diffusion of those two important truths, the unity of the Divine Being and the humanity of Christ: the expectation that the latter doctrine in particular, will speedily prevail in the world, seems to be justified, observes the writer, "by the simplicity to which it is now reduced, by the conduct of those who embrace it, in making an open profession of their faith, and by the temper and circumstances of their opponents:" this reasoning is enforced in a manner highly creditable to the talents and feelings of the preacher; and one of the notes contains an interesting account of the present state of the Unitarians of Prussia and Transylvania.

Among the useful publications circulated by the Society of Unitarian Christians in the West of England, are, a volume of Prayers for families, and another of prayers for individuals: both these works were compiled by Mr. Kenrick, partly from printed forms already in

* Discourses, Vol. II. No. xxxix.

existence, and partly from communications in manuscript, by himself, and several of his friends : both have been warmly approved and encouraged by the class of persons for whose advantage they were principally undertaken : and it may be presumed, that they have, in many instances, fulfilled the editor's design, by enkindling and cherishing the spirit of pure devotion.

Soon after the beginning of 1795, he printed, " An Address to Young Men, &c." which has been published since his death, in the first volume of his Discourses, and some extracts from which will enable the reader to perceive the judgment and impartiality with which he conducted his lectures, and his zealous regard for the highest interests of the rising generation.

Concerning the means of improvement in piety, he says,*

" It is a truth which cannot be too strongly inculcated upon young persons, that a regular and frequent performance of the exercises of devotion is particularly necessary for *them* ; upon this plain principle, that the less there is of a devotional spirit, the more cultivation it requires. Those who have long performed these exercises with proper attention, who have acquired just notions of the Divine Being, and impressed them deeply upon their hearts, may almost venture to trust themselves to the habits they have already formed : these will dictate to them such a temper and behaviour towards God, upon all occasions, as it becomes human creatures to maintain ; or at least tend to strengthen and confirm the dispositions they have already acquired. The occasional omission of a religious exercise, will do them comparatively little injury ; but to young persons it may be of fatal consequence, by preventing them from forming a devout habit of mind, and thus leaving it to be exposed, untinctured with religion, to the corrupting influence of the world. Be constant and punctual, therefore, in observing the exercises of devotion. Avoid the practice of attending public worship one part of the day only, and, still more, the pernicious custom of spending the whole of the Lord's day at home, in idleness or amusement ; a custom which, if it were to become general, would do much towards banishing all serious piety from the kingdom. You have need of all the assistance which you can

* P. 5. 6.

obtain, and cannot neglect any, without losing an important benefit."

Equally pertinent are his remarks upon the study of the Scriptures : *

"—what dignity and perfection, what consolation and joy, the pure religion of Jesus is capable of communicating to mankind, has hardly yet been ascertained ; for no sooner did the Christian doctrine proceed from the first teachers, than it was debased by error and superstition—nor can we expect to feel its full and genuine effects upon the heart, until it shall be purified from every corrupt mixture. Let it be your endeavour to obtain the divine will, in the purest state, from the only authentic records of it, contained in the Bible."

—"Some men, of a speculative turn, are pleased with what is new and uncommon in opinions, and, from this cause, are always inclined to change : but this weakness is confined to a few persons, of an unusual turn of mind. The error into which men are most apt to fall, is that of being prejudiced in favour of whatever doctrines have received the sanction of past ages, or of what they have been accustomed to believe.—While you are studying the Scriptures, be careful to avoid both these extremes.—If you read this book with a resolution to part with nothing you already believe, and only to find out better arguments in support of your present opinion ; if you can bear no interpretation of the language which gives a different sense from what you have been used to annex to the words, and reject it without examination, you discover a want of impartiality, and have great reason to suspect your love of truth."

In the year 1799, Mr. Kenrick printed a sermon which has for its title, "The future Existence of Infants asserted :—" the immediate design of it was to offer consolation to an afflicted family ; and, being now published,† it may serve to communicate the same comforts and hopes to Christian parents in a similar situation.

About this time he entertained the serious wish of again undertaking the office of tutor. To instruct the young, was an employment congenial to his mind ; and his delight in it, added to his

* P. 10, 11, 12.

† Discourses, No. xxxvi.

conviction of the urgent necessity of such exertions, in the cause of learning and religion, now induced him to project the re-establishment of an academical institution at Exeter, principally with the view of providing for a succession of Dissenting ministers. In the summer of 1799 he opened his house for this purpose ; having obtained the able co-operation of the Rev. Joseph Bretland in the classical and mathematical departments. Some of the students were designed for commercial and civil life ; and all were under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Kenrick, in whose family most of them resided, and from whom they received lectures in logic, the theory of the human mind, and the evidences, doctrines, and history of natural and revealed religion. In general, the course of instruction and discipline pursued in this seminary, resembled that which had been followed with success at Daventry. By the assistance of some of Mr. Kenrick's friends, in his immediate neighbourhood, and of others at a distance, exhibitions were given to a few students in divinity ; and to the same liberality he was indebted for a small but elegant set of philosophical instruments, and for some valuable books, in addition to the use of an excellent library with which he was obligingly accommodated by the trustees of the former academy at Exeter. Most of the young men who were placed under his care, are now filling respectable and useful stations ; and the cordial regard which they express for his memory is a sufficient indication of the merits of the tutor, and the gratitude of the pupils.

Considerable and various sacrifices were made by Mr. Kenrick, with a view to the effectual discharge of the duties of this relation. Nor should the obligation which he thus conferred on the friends of learning, religion, and free inquiry be lightly estimated. Had his seminary been situated in the centre of the kingdom, it would probably have attracted greater attention, and been more extensively advantageous. Such, however, was the reputation of its tutors, that it obtained increasing patronage. Mr. Kenrick, who was disinterestedly concerned to provide a succession of ministers properly qualified for their work, and who wished to see others feel an interest in the support of theological students rather than of an academy, had the satisfaction to perceive the growing credit

and utility of his undertaking : he witnessed with delight the improvement of his pupils ; and there is reason to believe that, had Providence lengthened his life, the academical institution at Exeter, humble and domestic as it was, would have rendered signal service to the cause of sacred literature and truth, liberty and virtue.

A short time before his own seminary was set on foot, Mr. Kenrick had been strongly invited to be lecturer in divinity, and presiding tutor in the New College at Manchester : the situation was honourable and important ; but, upon mature reflection, he declined the offer of it, from a persuasion, that the success of his labours, in the joint characters of pastor and tutor, was on the whole more likely to be promoted by his continuance at Exeter.

There, among friends who were able to discern his worth and eager to acknowledge it, and whose attachment to him was, in the highest degree, affectionate and respectful, he passed the short remainder of his days. This happy connexion was, alas ! soon to be dissolved ;—not, indeed, by the removal of Mr. Kenrick to a spot which appeared to present even fairer prospects of usefulness and comfort—but by the event which is hastening to dissolve all human ties !

In the summer of 1804 he paid a visit to his friends in Denbighshire : his health was apparently as strong as ever, and his spirits remarkably vigorous and cheerful. From a short excursion to Chester and Liverpool, he returned, August 22, to Wrexham ; and, during a walk, on the same evening, in the fields surrounding that town, he was observed suddenly to fall. Medical aid was instantly procured : but the spark of life was extinguished, beyond hope of its revival by human skill. At first there was some reason to suppose, that he had been precipitated to the ground by an obstacle which he encountered in his path, and that he had received, in consequence, a mortal blow : on a closer examination of the circumstances attending the event, it was more probably considered as the effect of an apoplectic seizure ; a complaint with which he had been once alarmingly attacked, many years before, and against which, no repetition of it being apprehended, no immediate precaution had been taken. On Sunday, August 26, he

was interred, among his ancestors, in the Dissenters' burial-ground at Wrexham.

The sensation produced in his family and friends at Exeter by the intelligence of his death, can more easily be conceived than represented. In every place, indeed, to which the information was conveyed, it excited the deepest sorrow of those who had known him : but it was natural that he should be most lamented in that city which had been the principal scene of his labours and his happiness, and where he was respected and beloved. One of the members of his late congregation thus wrote, upon the occasion, to the author of this memoir :

“ As a friend, a minister, and a tutor, Mr. Kenrick was the cause of our rejoicing, and the ground of our most sanguine hopes and expectations ;—and he will live in our memories while our memory shall last. The recollection of him, draws from us the tear of affection and gratitude : the sorrow which the event has occasioned among us must be seen to be conceived of : but then we weep not for *him* : we know it is well with *him*—but we weep for ourselves and for our families. When we look back on his labours of love among us, we seem unable to calculate the extent of our loss.”

By another respectable correspondent the feelings of affection and regret were forcibly expressed in the following paragraph :

“ The late mournful event has bereaved us of a friend as dear as a brother ; one whose memory I shall have reason to bless to the end of my days, and to whom I indulge the pleasing prospect of a re-union, when the sleep of death is over, never more to suffer the pangs of separation.”

The united congregations of Protestant Dissenters in Exeter made it their unanimous request to Mrs. Kenrick, “ That she will consent to have published the Expositions on the New Testament delivered by their pastor, and also two volumes of his Sermons.” * They justly considered that they could not erect a nobler monument to his memory ; and their letter, accompanying the resolution which contained this request, is highly honourable to their principles and feelings. While they deplore the awful and afflictive

* Preface to Discourses, p. 5.

dispensation which has bereaved them of a much endeared friend, and of a "minister whose learning and piety commanded their esteem and veneration—and the world of a character which, by its superior excellence, challenged distinguished respect:" they add,

"It is our duty, and will be our interest, to endeavour to recollect those just and sublime views of the divine perfections and government which our beloved pastor was accustomed to set before us, and which appeared to have so happy an effect upon his own mind. And we would hope that many of his surviving charge will have reason for blessing his memory to the end of their days, on account of the various instruction and solid comfort he so ably and faithfully imparted."

Mr. Kenrick's knowledge was various and well-digested. With the several branches of theology he had an intimate acquaintance, which he was constantly improving. His favourite employment seems to have been the interpretation of the Scriptures. Whatever investigation he undertook, he was indefatigable in pursuing it, and was able to communicate, with clearness and order, the result of his inquiries. The principal features of his mental character, were a sound and discriminating judgment, and a habit of deliberate attention. His style, though seldom ornamented, is usually neat, and always remarkably simple and perspicuous; and it was evident in his conversation, as it is in his writings, that he was no common-place thinker and observer.

In a moral and religious view, he attained to great eminence of character. Firm, upright, independent, he was, at the same time, kind and tender in his feelings, candid in his judgments, cordial and steadfast in his friendships, and generous and beneficent in his various intercourses with the world. The purity of his mind, his disinterestedness and self-denial, and the zeal which he constantly exercised for the accomplishment of important objects, were the genuine fruits of Christian piety and faith. His devotion was a principle and habit; and his consistency of conduct procured him general respect; while, united with the valuable qualities already enumerated, it cemented and increased the attachment of those who had the happiness of knowing him in private life.

Nothing so much distinguished him from the bulk of the professors of Christianity, and even from many of his brethren in the ministry, as his ardent love of religious truth. To discover and communicate the pure doctrines of the gospel, and to promote their efficacy upon the human character, were purposes for which he spared neither time nor ease, neither early prepossessions nor personal comforts and expectations. A sound understanding enabled him to form a satisfactory and mature judgment upon points of theological dispute: his inquiries into religious subjects was carried on in the spirit of religion; and it was some presumption of the truth of the doctrines which he zealously enforced, that they were embraced by a person of such qualifications and in such circumstances. While he avowed them with fortitude, he inculcated them in love. No man was less disposed to censure others for using that liberty of private opinion which he claimed and exercised himself: but no man was more hostile to dishonourable concealment and accommodation; no one was more faithful to the obligations of Christians and Protestants; and he might truly have said with the excellent Dr. John Jebb, "It is not my nature to give way to expediency at the expense of right. Moderation, when real, I honour: but timidity, or craft, under that appearance, I detest.*"

The sermons of Mr. Kenrick were plain and scriptural; intelligible to hearers of humble capacity and attainments, but instructive and acceptable likewise to men of reading and reflection; and they treated, with happy variety, upon devotional, practical, and doctrinal subjects. Of the superior excellence both of his discourses and his expositions the public has now an opportunity of judging; nor have the two volumes of the former, which made their appearance in 1805, failed of obtaining the approbation of persons who are signally qualified to decide upon their merits. Every other part of the pastoral office was discharged by Mr. Kenrick in a very exemplary manner. To the improvement of the young people of his congregation, his time and studies were particularly dedicated; and his services for their benefit, and for that of the poorer members of the society, can never be forgotten.

In his support of some valuable public institutions in Exeter, Mr. Kenrick was active and decided: in distant quarters of the king-

* *Memoirs*, (p. 185,) prefixed to the first volume of his Works.

dom, too, his character gave him no inconsiderable share of influence and reputation.

As a tutor, he was eminently punctual and vigilant, judicious and affectionate, impartial and persevering : he encouraged, instead of controlling, the inquiries of his pupils ; and gained their love, without forfeiting their respect.

It will justly be concluded that such a man appeared with great advantage in the scenes and offices of domestic life. Regularity and order, piety, affection, and harmony, reigned in his family. His treatment of his children was particularly distinguished by good sense and kindness ; and to the sincerity and warmth of his friendship, to the amiableness of his temper, and the gentleness of his manners, several will bear their testimony, with tears of regret and gratitude.

In the year 1786, he married Mary, daughter of Mr. John Waymouth of Exeter : by this lady he had six children, five of whom survive ; but at the birth of the last of them he lost the mother. During the year 1794, he formed an union with Elizabeth, second sister of the Rev. Thomas Belsham ; a connexion which has fully ensured to his promising young family the continued benefits of maternal tenderness and wisdom.

If those who enjoyed the best opportunities of knowing Mr. Kenrick, and who have the strongest reasons for lamenting the loss of him, are soothed and gratified by this imperfect Memoir, or if any are hence inspired with an ardent desire to imitate, as they are respectively able, his example, the wishes of the writer are accomplished.

J. K.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The common translation has been taken as the basis of this Exposition, and variations from it are distinguished by Italic characters and inverted commas ; the additions to it, in the form of glosses, &c. being in Italics, but without inverted commas. Thus in Matt. iii. 10, the words, “ lieth at the root,” are a corrected translation of the Greek words answering to, “ is laid to the root,” in the common version ; but the words, being put there ready for use, not being distinguished by commas, are to be understood as merely an explanation. When an erroneous translation of the same word or phrase occurs frequently in close connexion, the deviation is seldom noticed, except in the first instance.

ST. MATTHEW.

The genealogy of Christ, &c.

MATTHEW i.*

1. THE book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2. Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren,

3. And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar, and Phares begat Esrom, and Esrom begat Aram,

4. And Aram begat Aminadab, and Aminadab begat Naasson, and Naasson begat Salmon,

5. And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab, and Booz begat Obed of Ruth, and Obed begat Jesse,

6. And Jesse begat David the king, and David the king begat Solomon of her *that had been the wife* of Urias,

7. And Solomon begat Roboam, and Roboam begat Abiah, and Abiah begat Asa,

8. And Asa begat Josaphat, and Josaphat begat Joram, and Joram begat Ozias,

9. And Ozias begat Joatham, and Joatham begat Achaz, and Achaz begat Ezekias,

10. And Ezekias begat Manasses, and Manasses begat Amon, and Amon begat Josias,

11. And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon :

* [Respecting the omission of expositions on the two first chapters of Matthew, see the Preface, page vii.]

Why did he not give the names of the women?

12. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel, and Salathiel begat Zorobabel,

13. And Zorobabel begat Abiud, and Abiud begat Eliakim, and Eliakim begat Azor,

14. And Azor begat Sadoc, and Sadoc begat Achim, and Achim begat Eliud,

15. And Eliud begat Eleazar, and Eleazar begat Matthan, and Matthan begat Jacob,

16. And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17. So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations ; and from David unto the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations ; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations.

18. ¶ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise : When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20. But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife ; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS : for he shall save his people from their sins.

22. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24. Then Joseph being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife ;

25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son : and he called his name JESUS.

The wise men of the East, &c.

MATTHEW ii.

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3. When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea : for thus it is written by the prophet,

6. And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda : for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

7. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go, and search diligently for the young child ; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9. When they had heard the King, they departed ; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

13. ¶ And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word : for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt ;

15. And was there until the death of Herod : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

16. ¶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18. In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

19. ¶ But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20. Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel : for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

21. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither : notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee :

23. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth ; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

AN
EXPOSITION,
§.c. &c.

SECTION I.

Preaching of John the Baptist.

MATTHEW iii. 1—12.

1. IN those days, *while Jesus was yet at Nazareth*, came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa ;

John derived the surname of the Baptist from the circumstance of its being one of his principal functions to baptize those who came to him. When we are told that he *came*, we are to understand, by that phrase, that he had a special commission from God as a prophet ; and it is only an abridgment of another phrase, *coming forth from God*, which frequently occurs in the other evangelists ; or *coming into the world*.—The place where he made his first public appearance, in that character, was the wilderness ; not a country entirely desert, and destitute of inhabitants, but more thinly peopled than the rest of Palestine : for we find, from the book of Joshua, xv. 61, 62, that there were several cities and villages in it. In this country, which was also the place of his birth, John opened his commission, and first preached to the people.

2. And saying, Repent ye : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand :

This is the substance of what he delivered : for he explained, no doubt, more fully than in these few words, the purpose of his mission. The kingdom of heaven means the same thing as the kingdom of God ; heaven being put for God, because it is conceived to be his seat or palace. In describing the Christian dispensation

under the Messiah by the character of the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, an allusion was probably intended to the words of the prophet Daniel, (ii. 44,) who says, "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;" and in another place, (vii. 14,) after speaking of the son of man or Messiah, "and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should receive him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." As the greatest blessings were expected whenever this kingdom was established, the Jews would see the propriety of removing every obstacle which might prevent their enjoying them; an evil which would necessarily arise from their sins. John therefore requires them to repent, that is, to be sorry for their sins, and to reform their lives, if they wished to partake of the benefits of the Messiah's kingdom. After this account of the message of the baptist, there follows an observation of the evangelist Matthew upon his character, as corresponding with a prediction of one of the prophets.

3. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

This quotation from the prophet Isaiah is introduced to show the reason why John appeared in the wilderness; because it had been already foretold of the forerunner of the Messiah. Although he was sent to prepare the way for Christ, by announcing the approach of the kingdom of heaven, and exhorting men to repent, yet this was in reality preparing the way for God; since Christ was his messenger and representative, and God manifested himself by him in an extraordinary manner to the world.

4. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

John living in the wilderness, contented himself with such plain and simple food as the place afforded, and as was usually eaten by the inhabitants of those regions; with honey, which was to be found in the cavities of trees or the clefts of rocks; and with locusts, which are frequently used in the east, and not esteemed unpleasant food. In this diet there was nothing of excessive rigour or an ostentatious departure from common forms of living, but the usual plainness and simplicity of the country. The same thing may be observed with respect to his raiment, which was a cloth made of camel's hair, fastened round him with a girdle, which, we are told by travellers is still the ordinary dress of that part of Palestine. The reason why his dress and diet are so particularly noticed, seems to be not so much on account of any singularity which they possessed in that part of the country, as either to mark the resemblance between him and the prophet Elijah, by whose

name he was called in Malachi iv. 5, and who is described (2 Kings, i. 8,) as an hairy man with a leathern girdle, (Providence wisely ordaining that he who was to come in the spirit and power of Elias should also come in the same clothing,) or to show how different his dress and diet were from that splendid appearance which men in general, and the Jews in particular, might expect in that great prophet who was to foretell the approach of the kingdom of the Messiah.*

5. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan.

The uneasiness of the people under the Roman yoke made them expect with great impatience the coming of the Messiah, from whom they looked for not only deliverance from a foreign power, but likewise conquest and universal monarchy : this was probably the reason why so great a concourse of people, from all quarters, attended the preaching of John, who foretold the approach of that event.

6. And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

The Jews baptized all proselytes from idolatry to their religion, because, by joining the people of God, they came from an impure into a holy state ; and John by using this religious ceremony, intimated that the Jews, though already in covenant with God, had so entirely departed from the practice of true piety, that they were in a condition as impure as that of idolaters, and that, like them, they ought to change their whole course of life, before they could hope to be saved. He required from those who were baptized by him, a confession of their sins ; either of their sins in general, or, if their crimes had been of an extraordinary nature, a confession of their particular offences ; that they might receive from him advice adapted to their particular situations in life ; such as we find him giving to the publicans and soldiers.†

7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, "*O brood of vipers,*" who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come ?

The Pharisees were a sect among the Jews that pretended to a more exact observance of the law than the rest of their nation : they received all the books of the Old Testament as divine, but looked upon the tradition of the elders as of great authority, if not of equal authority with them : they believed that the soul is immortal ; that there will be a resurrection of the dead ; and that there is to be a future state of rewards and punishments. The Pharisees were the most numerous as well as the strictest sect among the Jews, and were so much in esteem with the common people, that

* Harmer's Obs. V. II. p. 295 ; V. I. p. 487.

† Luke iii. 12—15.

all things in religion were ordered as they directed. How wicked they were, there will be occasion to observe in other parts of the gospel.

The Sadducees were another sect among the Jews, and very different from the Pharisees; for they denied the immortality of the soul, and a future state of recompense: they said that the soul died with the body, and that there is no resurrection or spirit: they rejected all the traditions of the elders, of which the Pharisees were so tenacious; and it has been thought by many that they received no books of the Old Testament as canonical and divine, but the five books of Moses. They, however, expected a Messiah, as the other Jews did: they were but few in number, chiefly the rich and men in power. Many of these two sects came to the baptism of John: but a majority of each were probably unbelievers in him; for it is said expressly of the Pharisees by Luke, (vii. 30,) that they had not been baptized by John; and in another place it is intimated that they did not acknowledge that his baptism came from heaven. These sects John compares to broods of vipers; *a subtle and malicious creature*—a character which, it appears from history, was extremely well suited to them: he also expresses his surprise, that they should do a thing corresponding so little with their temper and inclinations, as to come to his baptism, in order to avoid the impending punishment in the destruction of the Jewish state, which I suppose to be referred to by *the wrath to come*.

8. Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

Since you have been warned, bring forth such good works, (which every where in the New-Testament are called fruits,) as become a sincere repentance.

9. And think not to say, “*say not,*” within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

The Jews valued themselves highly on account of their relation to their ancestor Abraham, for whose sake they supposed themselves secure of the divine favour, and safe from danger as a nation. It is the object of John the Baptist, therefore, as it was afterwards of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul, to remove from their minds this ill-founded pride and hope of impunity, which was the greatest obstacle to the cultivation of right dispositions and to all reformation of manners;—telling them that they were by no means so secure of continuing the peculiar people of God as they imagined; for that God was able to raise children to Abraham from the most inanimate parts of nature; as he had already raised seed to him from one as good as dead; and that he would rather do so than show favour to them while they continued to disobey his laws. In these words there may be an allusion to the call of the Gentiles, who, by their faith and obedience, should deserve to be called the children of Abraham, but from whom the Jews would expect those virtues no sooner than from stocks and stones. The Jews had

looked for national deliverance by the Messiah : but John warns them, in the next verse, of national judgments.

10. And now also the axe is laid unto the root, "*lieth at the root,*" of the trees, *ready for use* ; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

The national calamities with which you are threatened, are no light evils, but such as, if you do not repent, shall be like cutting up the tree by the roots : for as barren trees, which bring forth no fruit, are hewn down and cast into the fire, so shall it be with you, if you perform not good works ; your kingdom shall be overthrown, and the inhabitants of the land utterly extirpated.

11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, *upon the profession of repentance which you make*, but he that cometh after me is mightier, "*hath more power,*" than I ; whose shoes I am not worthy to bear : he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire :

John here speaks of his successor, who was to come from God, or to have a special divine commission, after him ; telling the Jews that the power and authority of this eminent personage would be so much greater than his own, that he was not worthy to perform for him the meanest office which a slave performs for his master, that of taking up and carrying away his shoes, when he has put them off. "By repentance and amendment of life, you may escape the destruction of which I have been speaking : to this repentance I have endeavoured to lead you by my preaching and baptism ; but in no other way : for to those of you who become his disciples, he will communicate the holy Spirit in the most plentiful manner, as water is poured out in baptism, agreeably to the language of God by the prophet Joel, (ii. 28,) "I will pour forth of my spirit upon all flesh ;" but those who continue impenitent and persist in their vices, he will baptize with fire, that is, with those dreadful calamities which will fall on the unbelieving part of the nation at the destruction of your city and state, and which may be well represented by a baptism with fire."

Whatever causes calamity and destruction, is, in Scripture, called a fire : thus the tongue is a fire, and God is a consuming fire. It is the remark of Sir Isaac Newton, in his *Observations upon the Prophecies*,* that in the prophetic style, burning any thing with fire, is put for the consuming thereof by war. That it is to such a calamity John refers, when he says that Christ should baptize with fire, and not to the holy Spirit's descending upon the apostles upon the day of Pentecost, in cloven tongues of fire, as has been usually supposed, seems evident, because the appearance of the cloven fiery tongues was only a circumstance accompanying the

* Part i. ch. 2. p. 18. ed. 1733.

baptism of the Spirit, but not a distinct baptism of itself; and when Christ quotes this prediction of John to his disciples, after his resurrection, he drops the latter clause, and says simply, “for John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the holy Spirit not many days hence; leaving out the words, *and with fire*; for they were not the persons to be baptized with fire, but a very different class of people.*

12. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, “*granary*,” but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

In this whole verse the destruction of Jerusalem is expressed in the terms of husbandmen. The fan was a winnowing instrument, which separated the chaff from the wheat. The grain thus cleansed, was put into the granary, to be preserved from the injuries of the weather, and the chaff had fire put to it, to prevent it from being blown back into the threshing-floor; and that fire burnt on till it consumed the chaff, without being quenched. In the same manner as the husbandman acted towards his corn, so would Christ act with respect to the Jews. They are called *his floor*, because he was sent immediately to them: by the purity of his doctrine he would separate the good from the bad. The worthless part of the nation, disliking that excellent system of religion which he introduced, would reject him; but the virtuous part of the people would believe in him. The former are to be visited with the most terrible judgments, which are expressed in prophetic language by inextinguishable fire: (See Isa. xli. 16:) which prophecy was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: but the Christians were preserved in safety; having, in conformity with the warnings and directions of Christ, retired from the city when it was besieged.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the character of John the Baptist, we see an excellent example of simplicity, integrity, and humility.

Although sent to announce the greatest event that ever took place in the world, and the most welcome intelligence to the Jews, he assumes to himself none of that outward pomp or magnificence which might be suitable to his design, and give proper lustre to his embassy in the eyes of the Jews; but appears to proclaim this good news, in the ordinary garb, and with the simple diet, of his countrymen and neighbours. Many of his wealthy attendants were able to provide for him in both these respects more sumptuously, and would probably have been better pleased with his message, if he had accepted their assistance for this purpose: but he chose to continue this plain mode of living, lest he should encourage in men's minds improper notions of the new kingdom which was at

* Acts i. 5. Theol. Rep. 5. I. 396. Wakefield's Silv. Crit. pt. ii. p. 65.

hand, or excite a suspicion that he assumed the character of a divine messenger, from some motive different from that of obeying the command of God. Happy are those, who like him, can deny themselves the superfluities of life, when it is necessary to promote the interests of religion! Let us learn from his character not to judge of men by their dress or external appearance: under a mean garb, there may be true worth and a character of uncommon virtue. Let the ministers of religion, in particular, learn, that outward splendour is not necessary to the success of their labours: neither the forerunner of Christ, nor the Saviour himself, nor any of his apostles, set any value upon these advantages; yet they were all successful preachers: they trusted rather to the evidence and importance of what they taught than to their own external appearance; and so may all those who are employed in inculcating the same important truths: outward show, however it may be calculated to captivate the ignorant, awakens in more discerning minds a suspicion that there is some defect which this show is necessary to hide, or that those who affect it have nothing else to recommend them.

In the freedom with which John censured the Pharisees and Sadducees, we see his courage and his integrity: he did not court the favour of these powerful sects, by concealing their vices or flattering their prejudices; however favourable such a conduct might have been to his own ease, or the success of his mission; he gives them their true character in plain words, and exposes the weak subterfuges by which they imposed upon themselves. The same intrepidity led him afterward to censure persons of much higher rank, and proved at length the cause of his death: but let us not condemn it as rashness: it was the natural consequence of the excellence of his own character, which made him incapable of beholding great vice without severe reprehension, and furnishes us with a proof of the truth of his other declarations in the office of a divine messenger, which almost supplies the place of miracles.

He well knew that the splendid works of his successor would eclipse his own fame: yet he speaks of him in the highest terms of praise, but of himself in modest and even degrading language; thus showing that he was free from the jealousy of little minds, and that his humility was equal to his courage.

2. How thankful should we be that the kingdom of heaven is already come among us! John was sent to tell the Jews that it was at hand; and such a message from heaven ought to have been received by them with sentiments of the warmest gratitude to that Being from whom it came: but we have enjoyed the benefits of this divine institution, and find them to be much greater than it was possible for us to have supposed. Let us rejoice in this new administration of grace and mercy among mankind; let us trace with pious gratitude and admiration, the various steps which were taken by infinite wisdom to introduce it, and earnestly pray that the prosperity and enlargement of this kingdom may be advanced in the world, till it shall cover the whole earth, and be raised to the highest pitch of glory.

3. We see that, to receive the benefits of this kingdom, it is necessary that we repent and bring forth fruits suitable for the pro-

fession which we make of repentance. It is not our being descended from pious ancestors, or submitting to religious ordinances, whether baptism or the Lord's supper, or trusting to the merits of another, although much greater than Abraham, that will secure to us the divine favour, without a good life. The Jews have long since tried the efficacy of such means, and found them insufficient; nor can we expect to be more successful in making the same trial. Reformation and amendment of life are absolutely necessary to our salvation: if we have not already brought forth these good fruits, it ought to quicken our endeavours to produce them, to recollect that a period is approaching, when there will be a more complete separation of the righteous from the wicked than any which can take place in the present world; when the one shall be taken into a place of everlasting security and rest, but the other be doomed to unquenchable fire. This solemn day may be nearer to some of us than we are aware: the axe is already laid at the root of the tree; God grant that the fatal blow may not be given before we are prepared!

SECTION II.

The Baptism of Jesus.

MATTHEW iii. 13—17.

13. THEN cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, unto John, to be baptized of him.

Nazareth, where Jesus lived, was a city of Galilee, and at no great distance from Jordan: from this place he came to be baptized by John.

14. But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee; and comest thou to me?

The unwillingness of John to baptize Jesus, on this occasion, did not arise from his knowing him, at this time, to be the Messiah, and from a consciousness of his own inferiority to him, in a public character; for we are told, by the evangelist of the same name, that he knew not who was to sustain that office, before the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him; (John i. 33;) "and I knew him not, but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost; and I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God." Until this time, John knew not that Jesus was to be the Son of God: this was wisely kept secret from him, to prevent all suspicion of a combination between them: but he was well acquainted with his person and private character, in consequence of their being related or of some other circumstance. This was so excellent and superior to his own, that he deemed it a kind of presumption in him

to baptize a person so far above him in moral worth ; he would therefore have excused himself, saying, " the baptism of repentance is unnecessary for thee ; or, if either of us is to be baptized by the other, I ought to be baptized by thee ; seeing thou art much better than I."*

15. And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Suffer it to be so now ; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

Jesus could not be diverted from his purpose by these honourable declarations of the Baptist's, but persisted in desiring to be baptized. " If my character be so excellent as you have represented it, it is peculiarly becoming in me to fulfil every duty, and to do whatever is right and proper to be done, on all occasions. As the ordinance which you administer is of divine appointment, I wish to show my respect for every institution of God, by submitting to it : as you announce the approach of the Messiah's kingdom, I wish to bear a public testimony of my faith in your prophetic character, and to declare my expectation of that glorious event." With these reasons John was satisfied.

16. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went straightway out of the water ; and lo, the heavens were opened, "*heaven was opened*," unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.

We are to consider the opening of the heavens as an appearance rather than a reality ; for a bright light descending from the sky would make it appear to open, as is observed when it lightens. The appearance, which followed, was the Spirit of God manifested in a bright light or glory ; most probably the same with the *Shechinah* ; descending like a dove ; that is, not in the shape of a dove, but with the same tranquil and easy motion with which a dove descends to the earth : for although Luke (iii. 22) appears to say " in a bodily shape like a dove," his words would be more properly rendered *bodily appearance*, and will then correspond with the language of the other evangelists. The bright light or glory which led the children of Israel in the wilderness, and afterwards appeared in the temple, and which the Jews called the *Shechinah*, had a bodily appearance, but no shape : it was this appearance which now descended upon Christ. Of a like nature with what is said here concerning the Holy Spirit, is what we read, Luke x. 18, where, when it is said " I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven," the meaning is not that Satan was like lightning, but that he fell from heaven as lightning, with the utmost swiftness and precipitation. The person who saw the Spirit descending like a dove upon Christ was John the Baptist, although it seems here to

* Theolog. Repos. vol. V. p. 249.

be referred to Jesus; for he says, in the evangelist John, (i. 32,) "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove." There is an evident resemblance between this miracle and that performed upon the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of cloven tongues of fire. They were both intended to show that the persons thus honoured, were qualified for that office by the communication of extraordinary powers.

17. And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved son, in whom, "*with whom,*" I am well pleased.

What we are to understand by Christ's being called the Son of God, seems to be explained by himself: for when the Jews charged him with blasphemy for saying that God was his father, he replied, (John x. 36,) "say ye of him whom the father hath sanctified and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said I am the son of God?"—whence it is evident that the being sanctified, or set apart to a high office by miraculous powers, and being sent into the world with a divine commission, were, in our Saviour's opinion, sufficient reasons for assuming the title of the Son of God.—Christ is here called the beloved son of God: for while others were sons of God, Christ was his son in a peculiar and transcendent sense; as to him the Spirit was not communicated in measure. The reason why Jesus was chosen to be distinguished by these peculiar honours, to have the wisdom and power of God residing in him, was his superior moral excellence, on which account his father was well pleased with him.

REFLECTIONS.

1. OUR Lord's desire to be baptized by John, teaches us, that we ought to observe with exactness and care, all positive institutions. If they are of inferior importance to moral duty, yet, since they are appointed by heaven for our benefit, they ought not to be neglected: it is the part of a good man, and especially of a perfect character, to submit to them with readiness and zeal; not doubting their utility, while they are known to be of divine appointment. They who neglect baptism, or an attendance upon the Lord's supper, longer than is necessary, do not fulfil all righteousness, and fail in the discharge of their duty.

2. Since a voice from heaven has declared Jesus to be the Son of God, let us learn to honour and revere him in that character: he comes in the name and under the authority of God himself: he is fully qualified to reveal his will, and to perform every other office of a Saviour. If we despise and reject him, it is not Jesus that we despise, but God who sent him. Listen with attention to his doctrine: it contains the principles of comfort and the means of salvation.

SECTION III.

The Temptation.

MATTHEW iv. 1—11.

THIS chapter commences with an account of an extraordinary divine vision with which our Lord was favoured immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit, which was intended to prepare him for the arduous office of the Messiah, by reminding him of the principal temptations to which he would be exposed in the exercise of his ministry. A vision is to be distinguished from a supernatural dream, in that certain scenes are presented to the imagination by the power of God, while the person who beholds them is awake, which, however, appear to him to be real objects; and he speaks and reasons upon them accordingly: the intention of it is, to make known the divine will by external symbols. We have several examples of these communications being made to prophets, both under the Old and New Testament. We are not therefore to be surprised that the great prophet of the Christian Church should be instructed in the same manner. If it should be asked why we have recourse to a figurative explanation of transactions which are related as plain matters of fact?—it may be answered, that there are sufficient intimations in the passage itself that it is to be understood as a divine vision; but that, if there were not the smallest hint to that purpose, it ought not to prevent us from considering it in this light; for many of those transactions which are recorded in the prophetic writings, or in the historical parts of the bible, as having actually taken place, had no other existence than in the mind of the prophet; and it is a maxim with all wise interpreters of scripture, that it is right to depart from the literal meaning of the words, if, when so understood, they contain any thing which is absurd or impossible, dishonourable to God, or inconsistent with the plain doctrines of revelation. Under some or other of these difficulties the present passage seems to labour, if it be taken in a literal sense: I shall therefore consider it as a symbolical vision, intended to represent to Christ, under the image of the supposed great adversary of mankind suggesting temptations, the trials to which he would be exposed in his public ministry; and I shall explain, in as few words as possible, the design of every transaction, upon this supposition. Those who wish to have the subject more fully explained, I must refer to an excellent piece upon Christ's temptation in the wilderness by the late Mr. Farmer.*

* In a posthumous work or pamphlet of Mr. Dixon of Bolton, published in 1766, by Mr. Seddon of Manchester, it is supposed that the following part of the history was intended to represent the workings of our Lord's mind after his appointment to the office of Messiah, which impelling him to evil, are attributed to the supposed author of all evil, the devil.

Rosenmüller, whether from his own authority or that of another person does not appear, supposes that the tempter might be a man, suggesting evil counsel, like the *Satan* who advised David to number the children of Israel. 1 Chron. xxi. 1. Scholia in N. T. tom. 1. pp. 69, 70. ed. 5a.

1. Then was Jesus, *immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit*, led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, "*brought by the Spirit into a wilderness*," to be tempted of the devil.

Christ was already in the wilderness ; for John baptized him in Jordan, which was the centre of it : it would therefore be improper to say that he was led into a place where he was already ; but if we understand by it that he was transported in imagination, not in person, into a wilderness which became the scene of the transactions which followed, the difficulty will be removed. To be brought or carried from one place to another in the visions of God, or (which is a phrase of the like import) in or by the spirit, does not denote any real local removal, but the being transported from one place to another, by way of mental lively representation under the power of a dream, trance, or ecstacy. In the same manner as Ezekiel, xxxvii. 1, was carried by a spirit into a valley of dry bones, and John, (Rev. xvii. 3) to a wilderness and high mountain, was Jesus brought into a wilderness. His vision consisted in the seeming appearance of the devil to him, carrying him to different places and urging various temptations ; although the devil had in reality nothing to do in the transaction ; the whole being conducted by the spirit of God.

2. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an hungered.

Under the influence of this vision he remained forty days without food, receiving miraculous communications from God ; the same length of time that Moses and Elijah (Exod. xxiv. 18. 1 Kings xix. 8) were miraculously supported without any kind of refreshment : but the divine power, by which he had hitherto been sustained without any nourishment, being withdrawn, he began to feel the keen sensations of hunger, and the vision was closed with the following scenes.—The fasting of Jesus left him at full liberty to attend to the divine communications which were now made to him, and at the same time prepared him for one of those trials with which the whole was to be closed ; in the same manner as Peter was prepared by previous hunger for the vision of the sheet which came down from heaven.

3. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be, "*inasmuch as thou art*," the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

It seemed to be suggested to Christ by the tempter, that it was very unsuitable to his dignity and peculiar relation to the Father, to remain destitute of the necessary supports of life, and that it became him to exert the miraculous power with which he was invested as the Messiah, for his own immediate relief. This was a specious temptation ; for why might not the Son of God, under the severe pressure of bodily want, and when he had no prospect of a supply in the ordinary way, exert his power for so important a purpose as self-preservation ? Yet the temptation was rejected.

4. But he answered and said, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, “*only*,” but by every word “*by whatever*,” proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

These words, which are borrowed from the writings of Moses, (Deut. viii. 3,) refer to the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, and assign the reason of God’s feeding them with manna from heaven. The meaning of Christ, in applying them to the present occasion, seems to be this: “the life of man may be sustained not by bread only, but by whatever other means God shall appoint, as appears from the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, of Moses and Elijah. I will not therefore, from a distrust either of his power or goodness, undertake to supply my own wants without an immediate warrant from him.” Thus did our Lord, from a principle of resignation to God and reliance on his power and care, refuse to turn stones into bread: but this scene was also prophetic, and had a reference to his future ministry, through the whole of which he was pressed with the same kind of temptations, and resisted them upon the same principles. It conveyed to him this general instruction, that, though he was the Son of God, he was to struggle with hunger and thirst and all the other evils of humanity, but was never to exert his divine power for his own protection or relief, but to wait for the interposition of God in his favour. Accordingly we find that, although he wrought miracles to feed the hungry multitudes, which followed him in the desert, he never relieved himself by miracle. The divine powers, with which he was invested, were designed as the seal of his mission, and were never to be applied to other purposes, lest their intention should be mistaken, or their dignity and authority destroyed: it was particularly necessary that they should not be applied to exempt him from the evils of life; for then we should have been deprived of the benefit arising from his example in conquering difficulties.

5. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, *Jerusalem*, and sitteth him on a pinnacle “*wing*” of the temple,

6. And saith unto him, Inasmuch as thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down. for it is written “He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

In this second scene of the vision, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judæa, and placed him on the wing of the temple, which commanded a view of the numerous worshippers below, and then said to him, “inasmuch as you are the Messiah, it becomes you to open your commission in the most conspicuous manner, and therefore throw yourself down hence in a dependence upon the divine protection which the Scripture promises you; and your miraculous preservation will induce the Jews to acknowledge

you immediately as the Messiah. In answer to the quotation from Scripture, by which the devil thought to enforce his temptation, which you will find Psalm xci. 11, 12. our Lord replies :

7. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, “thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

To tempt God is to make an improper trial of his power, to make new and unreasonable demands upon it, after sufficient evidence has already been afforded. In this sense the expression is used in the particular instance referred to by our Lord, Deut. vi. 16, as well as on many other occasions: his meaning therefore must be this: “The Scripture to which you appeal, forbids us to prescribe to God in what instances he shall exert his power, and as we are not to rush upon danger without a call, in expectation of an extraordinary deliverance, so neither are we to dictate to divine wisdom what miracles shall be wrought for men’s conviction.

Jesus was hereby forewarned of the frequent temptation which he would be under to an unnecessary display of his miraculous powers; and directed, even in bringing men to the faith, not to exceed the order of God, however called upon by the Scribes and Pharisees to give them signs from heaven.

Through the whole course of his ministry we find Christ assailed with temptations similar to that here proposed, and repelling them upon the maxim here adopted. Instead of needlessly running into danger, and then relying upon the divine power to extricate him, which must have occasioned an endless multiplication of miracles, we find him using the utmost caution in declining hazards. Instead of opening his commission at Jerusalem, and displaying upon that grand theatre the powers with which he was invested, he performed the first Miracle in Cana of Galilee, and made that obscure country the principal scene of his ministry for a considerable time. In the third temptation the scene changes.

8. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them,

9. And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

These two verses contain fresh and more striking proof of the necessity of supposing that what is here related passed only in vision; for Christ here, as before, is represented as holding familiar converse with a wicked spirit, which seems hardly consistent with the sanctity and dignity of his character: a supposed spiritual and therefore invisible being, is made to appear in a visible form, to speak with an audible voice, and to transport Jesus, his Lord and final judge, in his arms, through the air from one place to another; first to a wing of the temple, and then to the top of a high mountain. All these things are miracles, which no evil being has a power to work, since that is a power reserved for God alone. But, what is more difficult to be admitted than any thing yet mention-

ed, the devil is represented as showing to Christ all the kingdoms of the world from the top of a mountain, which is a thing in its own nature impossible ; for no mountain is high enough to command a fourth part of one side of the globe ; much less could such a situation enable any one to see both sides of this vast spherical body, in an instant of time too, as Luke (iv. 6) tells us was the case. But supposing this scene, as well as other parts of this narrative, to be a vision, all these difficulties are removed. Jesus appeared to himself to be transported by the devil to an exceedingly high mountain, where he gives him a view of all the kingdoms of the world, with all their glory, and promises to put him in possession of them all, upon condition of his falling down and worshipping him.

10. Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

This proposal was rejected with indignation the instant that it was made ; Jesus commanding the tempter, with whom he seemed all along to converse, to depart from his presence that moment ; all religious worship being justly appropriated in Scripture to God alone. How absurd soever the offer which the devil makes to Christ of the kingdoms of the world must have appeared in other circumstances, and how little merit soever there could have been in rejecting it, yet in a vision the objects presented to the imagination are apprehended to be real, and actually to possess all the powers and properties which they claim. Hence it is that Christ does not dispute the devil's claims to the disposal of the world ; the offer of it in these circumstances appeared to proceed from one able to make it good, and there was just the same merit in rejecting it as if he had really done so. This scene, therefore, was a trial and discovery of Christ's present temper ; but it was principally intended as a presignification and warning of the like temptation to which he was to be exposed in the course of his ministry, during which he was called upon by the Jews, who expected their Messiah under the character of a temporal monarch, to employ those miraculous powers in obtaining worldly empire, which were to be wholly devoted to the erecting the kingdom of God, the kingdom of truth and righteousness, amongst men.

The Jews would have taken him by force and made him a king ; but Jesus, agreeably to the instructions which he received in this divine vision, rejected the honour which they intended him, although he possessed powers which would have enabled him to secure not only the throne of Judæa, but the throne of the world.

11. Then the devil leaveth him,* and behold angels came and ministered unto him.

The vision was now closed, and Satan departed from Jesus, who, being exhausted by his forty days fasting, was furnished with refreshments in a miraculous manner.

* Luke, in the parallel passage (iv. 13) says, *leaveth him for a season*, which accords very well with the opinion of Mr Dixon, above referred to ; for similar temptations no doubt again occurred ; but does not very well suit Mr. Farmer's hypothesis.

There was a peculiar propriety in communicating such a prophetic vision as we have now described to Christ, at this season; for having been invested with his office by a voice from heaven, and amply qualified for it by an unlimited communication of the Spirit of God; having received a revelation of the Christian doctrine, which he was now appointed by the Spirit to preach, during the forty days which he spent without food in the wilderness, as Moses spent the same time in the mount, when he received instructions from God relating to the old covenant; what could be more proper than to close this vision by a prediction and prefiguration of the trials which he was to combat in the execution of that great office which he was about to undertake; what more reasonable than to state the ends to which his miraculous powers were to be applied, and the limits within which they were to be confined? He would hereby have an opportunity of arming himself with resolution to encounter these trials; and the honours which he had so lately received would serve to support him under the shock which such discouraging prospects might occasion.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE see Jesus, in whom God was well pleased, exposed to temptations and trials: let us not therefore expect to be exempted, or complain if we are visited with the like evils. Human nature, in its most perfect state, was not free from them: nay, we see that the higher men's stations, offices, or endowments are, the greater in proportion are their difficulties. We have no reason therefore to be discouraged if they are our lot: we ought not to regard them as marks of God's displeasure, but as the appointments of infinite wisdom for our benefit; the means which are employed to improve and exercise our virtue, to afford us an opportunity of obtaining a victory and triumph and of increasing the lustre of our future crown.

From Christ's example we learn the most successful way of resisting temptations: it is by arguments drawn from the word of God; by yielding to the first dictates of conscience, without deliberating a moment; for he who deliberates, shows that his heart is corrupted already.*

2. The history of this divine transaction tends to exalt our ideas of the character of Christ, and to confirm our faith in him as the true Messiah. In the reluctance of John to administer to him the ordinance of baptism, we have a pleasing testimony to the excellence of his private character, before he received the holy Spirit: the voice from heaven was a still more striking testimony to his excellence: but his conduct in the prospect of sufferings, and while exposed to temptation, is not, perhaps, the least satisfactory evidence of his singular fortitude and virtue. Besides resisting present solicitations to swerve from his duty, which had to him all the force of real scenes, we find him undertaking the office of the Messiah, although he was forewarned of the difficulties and dangers which he

* Farmer's Inquiry, &c. (3d ed.) p. 144, &c.

would have to encounter : he knew that his miraculous powers were not to be employed for his own pleasure or aggrandizement ; that they were not to be exercised to supply his own most pressing wants, nor even to preserve his life when in danger : yet we find him, under all these restrictions, cheerfully entering upon an employment the most hazardous and difficult in which any one can be engaged—the office of correcting the prejudices and reforming the vices of mankind, which generally proves fatal to him who undertakes it. What could induce him to assume a character, which he foresaw would be attended with so many evils, and accompanied with so few temporal advantages ? Could he find any motive to do it but the persuasion that he was appointed to it by God, that he should secure his favour thereby, and that his sufferings and death in this world would be followed by a resurrection from the dead, and an illustrious crown of glory in heaven ? How warm must be the ardour of that piety and benevolence, which could not be damped by the clear foreknowledge of the greatest trials, and how confidently may we rely upon the declaration of one who has so many testimonies to the integrity of his character !

3. We learn hence who is the only proper object of religious worship : Christ has declared it to be the language of Scripture, “that we are to worship the Lord our God,” and him only we are to serve in that manner. Whoever persuades us to pay divine honours to any other being, advises us to do that which Christ would hear and reject with indignation, as he does the proposal of the tempter.

SECTION IV.

Jesus preaches in Galilee. Calling of Peter and Andrew, James and John.

MATTHEW iv. 12—25.

12. Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee ;

13. And, leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt at Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Naphthali.

After the vision of Jesus in the wilderness, several events took place, before John the Baptist was cast into prison by Herod, which are here passed over by Matthew, but which are recorded by the evangelist John. Matthew begins the account of our Saviour's ministry from the time when he left Nazareth, where he was, probably, born, and which had been the ordinary place of his residence, till then, to go to Capernaum, a considerable city, where he did many of his mighty works. It is here said to be situated upon the sea-coast, that is near the lake of Gennesareth, which is some-

times called the sea of Galilee, and the sea of Tiberias; the Jews calling any considerable collection of waters a sea.—This was of no great extent, being only forty furlongs in breadth, and a hundred and forty in length. The river Jordan ran into it; and the country belonging to the two tribes of Zabulon and Naphthali was situated upon the north-western shore of the lake.

14. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

15. The land of Zabulon and the land of Naphthali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, "*by the side of Jordan,*" Galilee of the Gentiles.*

This country is called Galilee of the Gentiles because, in consequence of Solomon's having given twenty cities here to Hiram king of Tyre, of which you have an account 1 Kings ix. 11, 13, it was filled with foreigners, and inhabited by a mixture of Phœnicians, Egyptians, and Arabians: these, being heathens, were involved in great ignorance of religion, and therefore might justly be described, as they are in the next verse, as a people sitting, or dwelling in darkness.

16. The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up.

The passage here quoted will be found in chap. ix. of the prophecy of Isaiah and the first two verses. The prophecy in its original sense, relates to the deliverance of the Jews, when the army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was defeated, and Jerusalem delivered from a siege, of which you have an account in the second book of Kings, chap. xix. Matthew applies it to the spiritual deliverance which Christ brought to Galilee by his presence and preaching. While the inhabitants were involved in the grossest ignorance, Christ communicated to them much knowledge, which is often represented in Scripture by light.

17. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Christian dispensation is here called the kingdom of heaven, in allusion to the words of the prophet Daniel, (ii. 44,) who says, "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;" this kingdom was to be entirely of a spiritual nature; but the Jews understood it of a temporal monarchy. To enjoy the blessings of it, it was necessary to repent of their sins and reform their lives; this conveyed to them a sufficient intimation that it was to be spiritual.

* The word here translated *beyond*, sometimes signifies *by the side of*, and must be so understood here, because these two tribes inhabited the western side of Jordan, which was the side lying nearest to Judæa and Galilee; and therefore not beyond Jordan.

18. And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea : (for they were fishers.)

Andrew was a disciple of John ; and it is therefore probable that his brother was likewise : they had both been with Jesus before this time, when he gave to Simon his surname ; as appears from John (i. 41, 42,) “ He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, we have found the Messias ; (which is, being interpreted, the Christ,) and he brought him to Jesus ; and when Jesus beheld him he said, thou art Simon the son of Jona ; thou shalt be called Cephas (which is, being interpreted, a stone).” Peter signifies the same in the Greek language as Cephas does in the Syriac. After this time they both went home, and now received a second call.

19. And he saith unto them, Follow me ; and I will make you fishers of men ;

That is, to draw men into the belief of the gospel by your preaching.

20. And they straight-way left their nets, and followed him.

21. And, going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship, with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

This was James the elder, who was afterwards slain by Herod : (Acts xii. 1, 2 :) there was another James among the apostles, the son of Alphaeus. John was the evangelist.

22. And they immediately left their ship and their father, and followed him.

23. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

The gospel is the good word, account, or news, or, as it is elsewhere rendered, the glad tidings. (Luke viii. 1.) “ He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of heaven.” It is here called the gospel of the kingdom, that is, the good news of the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom of heaven which was now about to be established.

A synagogue signified, at first, an assembly of the people ; but it came afterwards, like the English word *church*, to mean the building in which such assemblies were held. These were erected in every considerable town in Judæa, and even in foreign countries

where there were many of that nation. In these places the Jews assembled every sabbath-day, to hear the law and the prophets read and explained ; particular persons were appointed for this purpose, who were called scribes, and acted under the direction of certain officers, who were called rulers of the synagogue. We ought not to be surprised that Christ was allowed to speak in their synagogues : for it appears that, after the ordinary business was finished, this was an honour usually offered by the rulers of the synagogues to any person of grave deportment and competent knowledge. (Acts xiii. 15.) When Paul and his company went on the sabbath-day into the synagogue of Antioch, and sat down, after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, “ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

24. And his fame went throughout all Syria ; *which lay adjacent to Galilee* ; and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, “*possessed with dæmons*,” and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy ; and he healed them.

The word “devils” is not here used in the original, nor throughout the New Testament, when possessions are spoken of, but “dæmons.” The heathens advanced human spirits to the rank of gods, whom they called dæmons : these they judged capable of entering the bodies of men for different purposes, according to their disposition ; those of a wicked and malignant nature, to inflict diseases producing phrenzy and distraction ; persons, therefore, who were afflicted with those disorders were said to be possessed by a dæmon. We have the clearest evidence that the heathens attributed certain bodily disorders, in which the understanding was affected, to the influence of evil dæmons, who had in reality no existence or power, but were, like the rest of the heathen deities, imaginary beings. This absurd notion, however, was embraced by the Jews, as we learn from Josephus, who lived nearly in the same age with the apostles, and was well acquainted with the sentiment of his countrymen in respect to possessions : he expressly tells us that dæmons are the spirits of wicked men who enter the living.* The writers of the New Testament therefore, and even Christ himself, when speaking of these disorders, call them by the names given to them among the Jews, and say that persons possessed were brought to be healed. They were not authorized to change the common forms of speech upon this subject, though founded in error ; for it was the object of their mission to teach men the nature of true religion, and not the nature of human distempers, which mankind were left to learn by the use of their own faculties. By lunatics we are not to understand the persons to whom we, at the present day apply that word, that is maniacs, but

* Joseph. Bell. Jud. 1. vii. c. vi. § 3.

those who were afflicted with the epilepsy, or falling sickness, as appears from the description which is given us of a lunatic by the evangelist Matthew, (xvii. 15,) “Have mercy upon my son, for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed with a dæmon; for oft time he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water:” in the other evangelists the same person is described as making grievous outcries, foaming and gnashing with the teeth, as being convulsed or torn, and tossed about on the ground—all which are plainly the symptoms of the epilepsy. This disorder, as well as madness, the Jews and heathens attributed to the possession of some wicked spirit, (but not to the devil or a fallen angel,) because the understanding is disordered in both cases; the mind having no command over the organs of the body. The reason why epileptics are called lunatics, was because the periods of the disorder was supposed to be regulated by the moon, and the fits to return every new and full moon. The persons then, of whom Matthew speaks in this passage, were maniacs and epileptics: these were afflicted with disorders very difficult to be cured, and therefore they are properly joined with those who had the palsy. The two distempers were different, although they were ascribed to the same cause—the spirit of a wicked man possessing the bodies of the sufferers. Those who wish to have this subject of possessions more fully explained, I must refer to the writings of Dr. Lardner and Mr. Farmer upon the dæmoniacs of the New Testament.

25. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond, “*from the side of*” Jordan.

Decapolis was a region of Palestine; so called because it contained ten cities, about the names of which men are not agreed: it extended on one side of Jordan, and on each side of [the lake of] Gennesareth.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE see that Jesus, though he knew of the imprisonment of John, was not deterred from undertaking the dangerous office to which he had been appointed; notwithstanding he was well aware that he should expose himself to greater evils from the hands of his enemies, than John could suffer by the hands of Herod. He hereby showed that a sense of duty and a desire to do good, had more influence over his mind than a regard to his personal safety. After his example, let us resolve to do our duty, and hereby keep a good conscience, although we see others suffering for the like conduct. To be terrified by the sufferings of any of the professors of pure Christianity, in the present day, or in past generations, will discover a timid spirit, unworthy of the disciples of such a master. This temper will be peculiarly disgraceful to those who are the teach-

ers and instructors of others, who ought to set an example of fortitude in their conduct.

2. Andrew and Peter, James and John, give up their employment, and leave their relations and friends to follow Christ; a master who had not sufficient wherewith to subsist himself, much less his followers, without charity, and had not where to lay his head.—Such sacrifices we also must be ready to make in proof of our attachment to Christ, and in obedience to the precepts of his religion: for he has declared, “whosoever loveth father or mother, wife or children, houses or lands, more than me, is not worthy of me.” Yet he has given us sufficient encouragement to make these sacrifices cheerfully, however great they may be; for whoever abandons any of these enjoyments for the sake of Christ, shall receive an hundred fold more now in this present time, in the peace and satisfaction of his own mind, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

3. Christ chose fishermen for his apostles; to be witnesses of his life and doctrine while he lived; and to transmit an account of them to the world, when he ascended into heaven. In the success of their ministry, we have an illustrious proof of the divine origin of the Christian religion. Behold the wonderful spectacle, the wisdom of the learned confounded, the power of the great overthrown, and the whole world subdued, by a few illiterate fishermen! Surely the weapons which accomplished such a change could not be carnal; there must be something more than human wisdom or human power in a scheme that prevailed by such feeble means.

4. Happy was the land of Naphthali, in which Christ opened his divine commission, by preaching the gospel; but more happy are we in this island, in having the whole scheme of the Christian dispensation displayed before our eyes! We were once involved in the grossest ignorance, when our ancestors were heathens, and sacrificed men and women to their gods; but that darkness was happily dispelled by the light of the gospel, and when involved again in the same clouds of error and superstition, under the dominion of popery, a glorious light sprung upon us from the reformation, and has continued to shine to the present day. Let us bless God, who has favoured us with so much light, while so large a portion of mankind are still in the region of the shadow of death.

5. In the miracles which Christ wrought, we have the most satisfactory proof of a divine mission which God could give or we desire. He declares that he was sent of God, to instruct mankind in his will. In support of this declaration, God changes the course of nature, by healing the sick, and curing those who were afflicted with every kind of disorder, not excepting the most inveterate; hereby setting his seal to the truth of what Christ taught. What better evidence, then, of any truth can we wish for than the testimony of God? While our faith is built upon this foundation, it is established upon a rock, against which the gates of hell will never be able to prevail: but this excellent foundation we weaken, or even destroy, by allowing that the devil is able of himself, or that he is allowed by God, to work miracles, by taking possession of the bodies of men: for how shall we be able to distinguish the miracles

of God from the miracles of the devil ; the messenger of heaven from the messenger of hell ? Let us be careful, therefore, how we admit a position which may undermine the foundation of Christianity.

Wherever Jesus proceeds, the divine power accompanies him : well might the wonderful and beneficent acts which he performed, spread his fame into the neighbouring kingdoms ! may his name continue to diffuse itself until it shall be extended over the whole earth ; until all mankind shall hear of, and embrace the gospel of Christ !

SECTION V.

The Sermon on the Mount.

MATTHEW v. 1—12.

1. AND, seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain : and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.

Christ went up into a mountain, that he might be better seen and heard, in speaking from higher ground to the crowds which now followed him ; and he sat down to teach, after the custom of the Jewish Rabbies. The disciples who came to him here, were not the apostles only ; for we have but four of them mentioned before this time ; nor the seventy disciples ; but all that attended upon his instructions, and began to believe, in consequence of the miracles which he performed, that he was either the Messiah or some great prophet. In this sense is the word *disciples* often used in the history of the evangelists, and almost universally in the book of Acts, where *disciples* means the same thing as *Christians*. Luke likewise tells us, (vii. 1,) in giving an account of the sermon upon the mount, that he ended his sayings in the audience of the people.—It is necessary to make this observation, in entering upon this sermon, respecting the persons to whom it is addressed ; for if it was delivered to the twelve apostles only, ordinary Christians might consider the precepts which it contains as not binding upon them, and imagine that they are entitled to no share in its blessings ; but what was delivered to believers in general, must be interesting to Christians in every age.

In order to understand the full force and propriety of Christ's discourse, it is necessary to consider the circumstances and present temper of his hearers. The Jews, it is well known, expected in their Messiah a temporal prince, who would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and lead them to dominion over the neighbouring nations, and to all those gratifications of their passions which are usually obtained by a victorious army. This was the error, not only of the profligate Jews, who might be supposed to fall into it from a desire of plunder and sensual indulgence, but likewise of

the more virtuous part of the nation, whom we cannot suppose to be influenced by such motives ; and the error even of the twelve apostles, who often disputed among themselves who should be the greatest in this kingdom, and put that strange question to Christ, after his resurrection from the dead, “ wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom again to Israel ? ” Acts i. 6. Being possessed with this notion, and hearing John and Jesus announce the approach of the kingdom of heaven ; seeing also the wonderful miracles which the latter wrought, they began to conclude he was sent to establish this kingdom ; they flocked to him in great numbers, hoping that he would soon declare himself publicly to be the Messiah, place himself at the head of an army, and lead them on to that power and honour which they had promised themselves under his government. These expectations had already awakened in their breasts ambition, avarice, and a desire of revenge and of sensual indulgences, with all those other evil passions which such prospects were naturally calculated to inspire. Christ, being well aware of the temper of the multitude, resolves to instruct them more fully than he had hitherto done, in the nature of that kingdom which he was come to establish, and to correct those false notions, which, he knew, they entertained of it, and which had raised in them so many evil passions. With this view, he describes the temper which he expected in his disciples ; and, in order that he might gain more attention from his auditors, he begins with the doctrines of the kingdom, in short sentences, which would have the appearance of a sort of paradoxes to them : for he declares those happy, whom men in general esteem miserable. It is not easy perhaps, to ascertain the meaning of each sentence : but what I have now mentioned, respecting the expectations of the disciples, will furnish the best key to the whole.

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3. Blessed, “ *happy*,” are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Under the reign of the Messiah you expect wealth, dignity and honour, and esteem those happy who attain them. This is not the temper which will qualify you to be my disciples : but I call those happy whose hearts are disengaged from the world, whatever their condition may be ; who, if they are poor, are contented ; and if rich, are not too much attached to their wealth, and have thus at all times the spirit which poverty is calculated to teach men. Such persons are prepared to receive my gospel, and to enjoy the blessings which it affords ; the knowledge of the truth ; the forgiveness of sins ; the gifts of the spirit : but those who are filled with the love and admiration of riches, are utterly unfit for becoming the subjects of my kingdom. It is not of humility that our Saviour is here speaking, but of a mind free from attachment to the world.

4. Happy are they that mourn ; for they shall be comforted.

You expect mirth and pleasure; you admire the gay and the jovial! but I esteem those happy who mourn on account of their past sins, or the evils which they suffer in my cause; for they shall afterwards enjoy more satisfactory delight than any of the pleasures which sense could afford.

If this passage be understood of present sufferings, on account of religion, it may be illustrated by the words of Christ to his disciples, in speaking of his departure from them: John xvi. 20, 22. "Verily I say unto you, ye shall weep and lament; but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy, and ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

5. Happy are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

You expect that my kingdom is to be introduced by martial courage and military exploits, and are ready to esteem those happy, who are able to procure to themselves wealth and power in it, although it should be by violence: but I esteem those happy who are of a very different character; who discover a spirit of moderation, equity, patience, and benevolence. If these virtues should fail to procure for them large possessions in this life, they will do for them something better, by securing to them an inheritance in heaven, the land of promise. The latter part of this verse, "the meek shall inherit the earth," is taken from Psalm xxxvii. 11, and used by Christ, in a spiritual sense, for all the joys of eternity.*

Of the first Christians it is said, Heb. x. 34, 36, that "they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and more enduring substance."

6. Happy are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

Hunger and thirst, by a common figure of speech, are employed to express any ardent desire. Righteousness is the way of righteousness, or the doctrine of that obedience which God requires from us, which leads to universal righteousness. Thus John is said to come in the way of righteousness, Matt. xxi. 32.

"They shall be filled." All the blessings of God are represented under the image of meat and drink, Isa. lxx. 13, "Behold my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry;—shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty." The Hebrews called their law the food of the soul; and Christ calls the gospel sometimes by the name of bread, at other times by the name of water. Those, therefore, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, are those who have an ardent desire of salutary spiritual food which the Messiah was to bring,

* Dr. Priestley understands the psalm and this quotation by Jesus literally, and supposes that they both refer to living on the earth after the resurrection. See his Inquiry into the knowledge of the Hebrews concerning a future state, pp. 32, 33.

and who perceived the extreme need of it; as Zacharias and Simeon, and other holy men who waited for the consolation of Israel. The passage therefore may be thus paraphrased. "Happy are they who, instead of thirsting for the possessions of others, or for the things of this world, thirst after the knowledge of the divine truth and the means of virtue; for their desires will now be satisfied."

7. Happy are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

It is not my intention to train you up to deeds of cruelty and slaughter; on the contrary, I esteem men happy, who forgive those who have offended them, and show mercy to the distressed: regarding the afflictions of others as their own; for they shall hereby obtain from God that forgiveness of their own offences, of which all stand so much in need. What is here delivered in the form of a beatitude, is delivered afterwards in the form of an exhortation, Matt. v. 45. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses."

8. Happy are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

Think not of those sensual gratifications in which victorious armies too frequently indulge themselves; for I reckon those happy who not only abstain from the outward gratification of their lusts, but likewise restrain every improper inward desire. Those who are thus pure in heart, as well as in life, shall be rewarded with seeing God in heaven, who is the most pure of all beings.

9. Happy are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God.

By peace-makers we are to understand not merely those who make up differences which have arisen between men, but those who are studious of peace.—Those who are so, are most like God, and therefore are loved by him as children by a parent; for God is frequently called the God of peace. To be called the children of God is the same thing as being so, 1 John iii. 1, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called," that is *be*, "the sons of God." The meaning of the whole verse then is this: "I come not, as you may foolishly imagine, to lead you to the field of battle, or to authorize you to propagate my religion by the sword; but I declare unto you that happy are they who avoid contention, and endeavour to extinguish it, wherever it is begun. They profess the temper and promote the designs of God, who is the God of peace."

10. Happy are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

By kingdom of heaven is sometimes signified the heavenly doctrine; sometimes the heavenly glory.—When Christ announces

the approach of the kingdom of heaven, we are to understand it in the first sense ; but here it signifies the glory of heaven ; for the next verse seems to be an explanation of this. “ So far am I from leading you to victory and conquest, that those who make a profession of my religion and obey its commands, must expect violent persecution. They may esteem themselves happy, however, in enduring it ; for they shall hereby be fitted for the heavenly felicity.”

11. Happy are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake.

12. Rejoice and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven ; for so persecuted they the prophets, “ *teachers*,” which were before you.

You must expect, therefore, persecution and every kind of calumny from the world, in consequence of professing my religion ; so that there shall be nothing so evil that men will scruple to say it of you : but you have no reason to be discouraged by these things, but rather to triumph ; for so they treated the teachers of the truth and the ambassadors of God in past ages, with whom it is an honour to be ranked ; and in proportion to your sufferings here, will be the greatness of your reward in heaven.

A prophet generally signifies a person who, by divine assistance, foretels future events ; but sometimes it means, both in the Old and New Testament, any person who delivers moral and religious instruction, although not possessed of a power of revealing any thing future. Thus Abraham is called a prophet ; for God tells Abimelech, “ He is a prophet, and shall pray for thee.” In this sense the word seems to be used on the present occasion ; for Jesus is now addressing himself to the whole body of his disciples, who were not all endowed with miraculous gifts, but were all teachers.

REFLECTIONS.

1. CHRIST, after the example of David in the first psalm, or of that person who collected the psalms into one book, begins his instructions with pronouncing those happy who observe them ; hereby teaching us the great end of religion, and the best method of inculcating its precepts upon others. The design of the gospel of Christ is to make men happy : all its precepts are calculated to remove, from individuals or societies of men, the causes and sources of trouble, and to communicate to them ease and joy, either in this world or in the next. They derive their value and excellence from their tendency to produce these effects ; nor can the friends of Christianity more effectually recommend it to mankind, than by showing the favourable influence which it will have upon their happiness ; for this is a motive which has the greatest weight with the human race, and is equally adapted to the feelings of the wise and ignorant ; since all desire to be happy, and value things in proportion as they are supposed to lead to that end. Christ has, therefore, shown himself a

wise instructor, by claiming a regard to his precepts upon this foundation ; nor can any one do religion a greater injury, than by representing it as an enemy to our happiness. This happiness, however,

2. Is of a very different nature from what the men of the world call by that name : they esteem the rich, the great, the gay, the victorious, happy ; those who live at ease, and who are able to gratify all their passions without restraint ; but those whom Christ calls so are the meek and the contented, the merciful and the penitent, the peaceful and the persecuted. Whose sentiments then shall we follow ? The opinion of the world or the opinion of Christ ? Is it not better to renounce the hope of wealth and greatness, of reputation and sensual indulgences, in order that we may receive mercy from God, be esteemed his children, inherit his kingdom, and behold his glory ?

3. Christ esteems those happy who hunger and thirst to know the way of righteousness, since their ardent desires shall be satisfied. Here is encouragement then for those who diligently study the Scriptures ; who are anxious to understand their meaning ; and who spare no pains that may be necessary for this purpose. They discover a temper which Christ approves, and are pursuing a course which, he has declared, will have a happy issue. They shall obtain a satisfactory knowledge of that way of righteousness and salvation about which they are inquiring : but those who are indifferent to the truth, who take up the religion of their fathers, or the religion of their neighbours, without inquiry or examination, are not included in this beatitude. God does not usually bless those with the knowledge of the truth, who take no pains to search it out.

4. The Christian religion enjoins upon those who embrace it, the most amiable and useful virtue ; a merciful, meek, and peaceable temper. Yet the professors of this peaceable religion, which is so admirably calculated to prevent or to heal troubles, and to keep the world quiet, were opposed and persecuted, as Christ foretold, as the disturbers of the peace of society, and those who turned the world upside down by their doctrines. Those who hold principles equally mild and equitable, and whose behaviour is alike peaceable, in the present day, ought not to be surprised or offended if they are treated in the same manner : so persecuted they the teachers and prophets that went before them.

Lastly, I shall conclude these reflections in the words of Dr. Blair, in his sermon upon the first verse of this chapter ; in which it is said that Christ, seeing or observing the multitudes, went up into a mountain ; whence he concludes that he adapted his discourse to what he observed to be the temper of his hearers.

“ I shall observe but one thing more,” says he, “ from our Saviour’s looking on the multitudes : namely, that, if this sermon was made upon his observing the present state and circumstances of the people, this ought to be a good example both to pastors and people. To pastors, that, in the choice of their subjects, and the manner of handling them, they have circumstances of their hearers chiefly in their eye, and adapt their discourses to their necessities and edification : and then to the people, that they take no

offence when necessary, free and useful truths are delivered to them, though ever so contrary to their worldly interests and expectations ; but that they learn to suffer the word of exhortation, and not only to suffer it, but to apply it to their own edification and salvation.”

SECTION VI.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW v. 13—20.

13. Ye are the salt of the earth ; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? “*seasoned?*” It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Salt, in the hot climate of Judæa, was so necessary a thing, that no meat undressed could be preserved sweet, though but for a short time, without it : frequent allusions are made to salt in the New-Testament, in this view.* Christians are here compared to this useful substance ; for as salt preserves animal food from putrefaction and corruption, rendering it wholesome and pleasant to the taste, so Christians, having received the knowledge of true religion, were intended by God to be the means of preserving purity of morals among mankind, by their example and doctrine : and as salt which has lost this preserving quality is regarded as useless, and thrown away, so Christians, if, instead of being qualified to correct and reform others, they need reformation themselves, will not answer the purpose of Providence, and will be rejected as insipid salt, or the vilest substances. By this comparison, it is plainly intimated, that Christians ought not to take their rule of life from other men, but endeavour to lead the way by their own example ; that it was their duty to study to reform mankind, and not to expect to be amended by them.

14. Ye are the light of the world : a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

15. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16. Let your light so shine, “*in like manner let your light shine*” before men, *referring to what was said before, not to what follows*, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

* It is a common thing for rock salt, when exposed to the air in hot countries, to lose its saline quality. Benson’s life of Christ, p. 301, from Maundrell.

When Christ calls his disciples the light of the world, he means, that as God made use of the sun to give light to the natural world, so he employed Christians to enlighten the world of mankind; by communicating to the ignorant a just knowledge of God and their duty; by convincing those who were mistaken, of their errors; and by raising men who were immersed in vice, to the practice of Christian virtue. There are two considerations which Christ makes use of, in order to prevail upon them to comply with this purpose of divine Providence. The former is, that they need not exert themselves to draw upon them the eyes of mankind; for their profession as Christians would render them sufficiently conspicuous, like a city set upon a hill; so that they might enlighten the world without any trouble. The other is, that the light which they possess was bestowed upon them with this express design, that it might be communicated to others; for as those who light a candle do not endeavour to cover it up, but place it in a situation where it may best afford light; so God had bestowed upon them the light of revelation, not merely for their own personal benefit, but likewise for the use of all those by whom it might be wanted. In the same manner then as men employ material light, let Christians use that which is spiritual; making it to shine upon all around them; the happy consequence of which will be that others, observing the doctrines of the gospel, and the good effects which they produced upon their conduct, will be led to embrace them, and profess themselves Christians likewise.

To glorify God commonly signifies to praise him; but it seems to mean here, believing in the gospel of Christ, by doing which, much glory is brought to God; and there are some other passages in which it is used in the same sense. Thus, Luke xxiii. 47, "Now, when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, certainly this was a righteous man;" that is, he acknowledged Christ to be what he professed to be, or the Messiah. So, 1 Peter, ii. 12, "Having your conversation honest amongst the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works, glorify God, in the day of visitation;" or acknowledge the truth of the gospel.

17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Some have supposed that by the law here mentioned, Christ meant the ritual or ceremonial law: but I see no reason why the Jews should imagine that he intended to abolish this law; for he had strictly complied with it; and there was nothing yet, in his doctrine or example, that should lead to such a suspicion: but there is a very natural reason why they should think that he would set them free from the moral law; for, imagining that the Messiah's kingdom was of a temporal nature, and that he would lead them to victory and conquest, they expected to be allowed to indulge themselves in all kinds of licentiousness, and supposed that the observance of the ordinary duties of life would be dispensed with. Having, therefore, in the preceding verses, pronounced a blessing upon those dispositions of mind which were directly opposite to

their worldly notions, it was very natural for him to tell them, in general, that they must not expect that he would set them free from those duties which were enjoined by the precepts of the law, and expounded by the prophets; but, on the contrary, by his doctrine and example, make them better understood and more strictly observed than ever they were observed before. His meaning, then, may be thus expressed: "Think not that there is any such liberty or licentiousness in my kingdom, that, to gratify your expectations from it, I will dispense with any of the rules of morality prescribed by Moses, and explained by the prophets.—I am so far from any design of annulling them, that I intend to teach them more clearly and perfectly than ever they were taught before.*

18. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Christ is not here speaking of the general conflagration at the end of the world; but the phrase, "till heaven and earth pass away," is a proverbial expression for any thing that appears impossible; for Luke says, (xvi. 17,) "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than one tittle of the law to fail." That heaven and earth should pass away, or perish, seems, in the nature of things, impossible; equally impossible is it, that the smallest part of the law should perish, or be destroyed. When Christ employs the word *verily*, it is to introduce something of great moment, which he wishes to impress with particular force upon the minds of his hearers. In this light, therefore, are we to regard the sentiment contained in this passage, that the smallest precept of the moral law will always remain in force.

19. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, "*shall break one of the least of these commandments,*" and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, "*teach them accordingly,*"† the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

These commandments are those which immediately go before and what follow; namely, the beatitudes, in which he had delivered a compendium of the commandments; and the following words, which contain a more diffuse application of them. *To be called* the least, is the same thing as *to be* the least; and the meaning of the passage is, that whosoever does or teaches any thing contrary to these commands, shall be esteemed of little value when the heavenly kingdom is completed.

* To fulfil, to supply defects and make complete, (πληρυσαι) Turner's Serm. xi. p. 324.

† See in Griesbach the authorities for οὕτως.

20. For I say unto you that, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees consisted in scrupulous exactness about rites and ceremonies, the number of prayers, fasts, alms, and tithes ; while the praise of men was their sole motive to these practices, and they neglected the weightier matters of the law. The same persons seem to be intended here by these two appellations ; the same persons were Scribes by their office, and Pharisees by their profession or sect. A Scribe was an expounder of the law of Moses and of the traditions of the elders : for this reason they are called lawyers, and said to sit in Moses's seat. The generality, if not all, of these Scribes, seem to have been of the Pharisaic sect. These Pharisaic Scribes, or, as they are commonly called, Scribes and Pharisees, were the bitterest enemies whom Jesus had, as we shall see in the course of this history ; and it is against them that Christ employs such severe language. He now informs his disciples, that unless their moral conduct was superior to that of the Pharisees, or to what they taught, they could by no means be admitted into heaven.

REFLECTIONS.

1. CHRIST calls his disciples the salt of the earth, because they are qualified to preserve the world from corruption ; but how little, frequently, does the conduct of those who rank themselves among Christians, correspond with this character ! Instead of endeavouring to reform the world, by their counsel or example, they join in its vices ; instead of holding out a pattern of virtue for others to imitate, they choose to follow the corrupt model which is given them. To do as the rest of the world does, is a maxim which has with many all the force of a divine law : in obedience to it, they hasten to comply with the follies, often with the vices, of those around them ; imagining that by this conformity to the world, they derive to themselves no inconsiderable degree of consequence : but, in the estimation of God, such behaviour renders them worthless : they answer not the design of their profession, nor any other useful purpose, but are like the salt which has lost its savour, which is cast away, as of no value, and trodden under foot of men. If we wish to make ourselves of real consequence, let us study to avoid the manners of the world, and not to follow them ; let us endeavour to season this corrupt mass by some portion of piety and goodness. This appellation was applied by Christ to persons in common life ; and all men may deserve the name, however private their stations, if their conduct be unblameable, and their discourse, instead of being full of malice and slander, of deceit and flattery, of impurity and filthiness, be always with grace seasoned with salt, as the apostle has recommended ; if they seize every opportunity of inculcating wise and useful maxims.

2. Christians are declared to be the light of the world, as well as the salt of the earth. This is an honourable and useful office, which they hold in common with the Redeemer of mankind. Let them show that they deserve it, by furnishing their minds with religious knowledge, and sparing no pains to communicate it to others. Without knowledge, the light which is in them will be darkness; and without a free communication of it to their brethren, it will shine only to themselves. In maintaining this character, they must submit to some labour, and expect to be exposed to some inconvenience and danger from those who cannot bear the light; but neither indifference or fear ought to prevent them from discharging a duty which the Great Father of Lights has imposed upon all his children. Whenever the circumstances of mankind are similar to those of the first Christians; whenever a great portion of the world is involved in superstition and ignorance, as I fear will be the case for many ages to come; God will expect those who are enlightened with true knowledge to act in the same manner. Has God furnished you with talents, or placed you in circumstances, which have enabled you to acquire, what appear to you juster notions of religion than what are possessed by other men? Endeavour to communicate your superior knowledge to your brethren, by every fair method in your power, and at every season when you are likely to be heard. Say not, the work belongs to others; I have no call to engage in it; I leave it to those who are better qualified: Providence, which has given you more light, has, at the same time, given you a call to distribute it to all who are in darkness; if you keep it under a bushel, you make an ungrateful return to the Being from whom it was derived; you defeat the purpose for which it was bestowed, and adopt the maxim of that corrupt church which thinks it for the happiness of mankind to keep the world in ignorance.

3. We may learn, from the language of our Saviour upon this occasion, the great importance of the laws of morality. They are unchangeable and everlasting; it was the purpose of Christ's mission to explain, confirm, and perfect them: the smallest precept cannot be violated or weakened without disgrace and injury to the person by whom this is done. The most rigid observance of ceremonies, while we neglect the great duties of morality, will not procure us admission into the kingdom of heaven. Let us learn, therefore, to respect precepts upon which so much stress is laid, in what are deemed the most trivial instances; and remember that a degree of disobedience, which would be excusable in a heathen or a Jew, will be ruin to a Christian.

SECTION VII.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW v. 21—30.

21. YE have heard that it was said by them of old time, "*to them of old,*" Thou shalt not kill, and who-

soever shall kill shall be in danger of, “*shall be liable to,*” the judgment.

Christ, having told his disciples, in the preceding verse, that unless their righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, that is, that degree of righteousness which they, in their exposition of the law, required, they should in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven, here proceeds to mention several instances in which their instructions were grossly defective or corrupt. The first thing which he notices is their sentiments on the sixth commandment, which prohibits murder. This crime they confine entirely to the outward action of maliciously slaying a man, and supposed, that he who was not guilty in this respect, could not have offended against the divine law : but Christ declares, that he who indulges himself in unreasonable anger or reviling language, which often lead to murder, transgresses this law, and, although he may escape punishment from men, will be punished with a degree of severity by God, in a future world, proportioned to his guilt. This is the general meaning of this passage.

22. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, *i.e. with any person*, without a cause, shall be liable to the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, *Raca*, without a cause ; for this is to be understood with the two last clauses of the verse, as well as with the first ; will be liable to the council : but whoever shall say, Thou fool, or, “*Moreh*,” for the Syriac word ought to have been retained here as well as in the former instance, will be liable to hell fire, “*the fire of Gehenna*.”

The *judgment*, mentioned in this verse, seems to mean the lowest court of justice among the Jews, consisting of twenty-three persons, and belonging to every considerable city or town in Judæa. They had a power of inflicting capital punishment upon criminals, and put them to death with the sword. The *Council* signifies a higher court, usually called the Sanhedrim, which consisted of seventy or seventy-two persons, the members of which were called elders. Before this court crimes of a more atrocious nature were brought ; and the criminal, when convicted, was sentenced to be stoned to death. In the preceding instances, Christ refers to visible and temporal punishments, such as were familiar to the Jews, whom he was addressing : it is highly probable, therefore, that he intends some visible temporal punishment, when he declares, that he who says, Thou apostate, or *Moreh*, will be liable to the fire of Gehenna : what this fire was is well ascertained.

It is well known that the Jews in ancient times, imitating the idolatrous practices of their neighbours, used to burn their children in a slow fire, by enclosing them in a heated image of the god Moloch ; drums and cymbals beating all the time, to drown the cries of the expiring infant. The place consecrated to this cruel

and abominable rite, was called Tophet ; and the valley in which it was situated, the valley of the son of Hinnom, or Gehenna. In the same place the Jews in after-times burnt the dead carcases which were carried thither out of the city of Jerusalem ; in order to pollute it, and to prevent it from being applied to the same wicked purposes as before. To be burnt with the fire of Gehenna, came hence to be used as a proverbial expression for the most dreadful torments, and, in process of time, for the punishment of the wicked in a future state. It is in this latter sense that the phrase is commonly used by Christ and his apostles ; but, upon the present occasion, he seems to have in view only temporal and visible punishment. Willing to show the people, that there were different degrees of punishment for wicked men in another world, according to the nature of their offences, he employs a similitude for explaining the matter, borrowed from the different kinds of death which were known to the people, and which varied from each other in the degree of misery inflicted : beginning with the punishment of the court of judgment, and ending with the burning in the valley of Hinnom.

The offences here mentioned, rise one above another in enormity. The first is being angry with a person without cause. Christ could not mean to condemn all kind of anger ; for sometimes it is the indignation of a virtuous mind, and proceeds from a love to our brethren, or a concern for the honour of the Supreme Being : but he has in view such anger as exceeds the occasion which produced it ; as is accompanied with hatred to those who have given us offence ; or such as is of long continuance, and settles into malice : those who indulge themselves in anger of this kind, although they may not suffer any thing from human laws, yet will be exposed to that punishment from God in a future life, which shall correspond, in the degree of severity, to the inferior punishment inflicted by the court of judgment.

The next degree of guilt is where our anger breaks forth into actions, and produces reviling language ; leading us to call men by such harsh and unworthy names as are signified by the word *Raca*. This is of Syriac origin, and cannot be translated by one word into our language ; but it signifies a *light man*, sceptical in matters of religion, and inclined to become an unbeliever. He who applies this language rashly, and without reason, is guilty of a higher offence, and shall be liable to a severer punishment in a future life, corresponding to the higher degree of punishment inflicted by the Sanhedrim.

The last and highest offence is calling our brother *Moreh* ; meaning, not a *fool*, as our translation has it, (for Christ himself uses that term when addressing the Scribes and Pharisees, and it is not more abusive than the preceding) but a *rebellious person*, or an apostate from true religion. In this sense the word was often applied to the Jews, by God or the prophets, when they fell into idolatry, or were guilty of some great wickedness. For this kind of language, when applied by a Christian to his brother without reason, the highest degree of punishment is reserved ; such as corresponds to the burning in the valley of Hinnom.

Of all these kinds of offences the Scribes and Pharisees made light in their teaching and practice, as Christ and his apostles learnt by experience; for they did not scruple to call them by the most odious names which they could invent.

23. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother, "*any person,*" hath ought against thee, i. e. *any thing whereof he may justly complain*;

24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

The connection of these words with the preceding seems to be this: since wrath and reviling language are so offensive to God and so dangerous to you, let it be your first and principal care to avoid every such offence: but if, through human infirmity, you fall into this sin, your next business is to atone for it by an early repentance, which may be done if you, who have first offended, are the first to acknowledge the offence, and to adopt the means of reconciliation; and that so speedily, that there shall be no employment, however specious, not even offering a gift upon the altar, which you are not willing to defer till a reconciliation is accomplished. Christ here teaches us likewise that the duty of benevolence is to be preferred to ritual observances; since the one is to be neglected till the other be performed. The contrary doctrine was that of the Pharisees and lawyers; for they taught that gifts brought to the altar would expiate all offences which the judges did not punish; and even without reformation.

25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way, "*on the way,*" with him, i. e. *to the magistrate*, lest at any time, "*lest,*" the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, "*executioner of the law,*" and thou be cast into prison;

26. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means, "*thou mayest not,*" come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Be reconciled to the person whom thou hast injured, immediately, by acknowledging the fault, or making reparation; for from what is done among men, we may form a just conclusion as to what we are to expect from God. Among men, when an offence is committed, he makes the best terms who yields in time; whereas he who holds out till the matter is brought into a court of justice, and refuses to submit to its decision, is condemned in the whole penalty, and obliged at length to submit to the sentence, without favour or abatement. So it is with God, against whom we offend

when we injure our fellow-creatures: early repentance obtains pardon: but repentance deferred provokes severity. The language of Christ in this instance, only points out the evil effects of delay in religious matters: the counterpart, or the benefits arising from an early reconciliation, are suppressed, as being too obvious to need to be mentioned.

27. Ye have heard that it was said to them of old ;
Thou shalt not commit adultery :

28. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh
on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery
with her already in his heart.

Christ has here in view a person, whose mind being the seat of impure lust, cherishes the evil passion by the sight: for it is by the eye that lust enters the heart, and acquires strength there. The object of this unlawful desire is a woman; which may mean any woman; and then he is to be understood as speaking of fornication, which he certainly condemned, whether he do it in this passage or not: but he probably means a married woman in this instance; for it is of adultery that he has been speaking before. Men, who can only judge by external actions, give the name of a crime merely to the last act; but in the estimation of God, who searches the heart, he hath committed the crime who hath intended to do it, or hath wished that it were done. The law of the ten commandments does not expressly prohibit all offences; but only such as are the most atrocious of their kind. Thus it does not prohibit all falsehood to our neighbour, but false witnessing against him; nor every injury to his property; but theft; nor all unlawful commerce between the sexes; but only adultery. Christ however here informs us, that whoever indulges himself in any thing which may lead to that offence, is guilty, in a certain degree, of the crime of adultery.

29. And if, "*if even,*" thy right eye offend thee,
"*be leading thee to sin,*" pluck it out, and cast it
from thee: for it is profitable for thee, "*it is better
for thee,*" that one of thy members should perish, and
not that, "*than that,*" thy whole body should be cast
into hell.

30. If even thy right hand be leading thee to sin,
cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is better for
thee that one of thy members should perish, than that
thy whole body should be cast into hell.

In these two verses Christ is replying to a tacit objection, which, he was aware, might be made to what was said before: for some would plead, that it is extremely difficult to prevent the eye from leading the heart to transgress, and to avoid the influence of an improper passion upon the mind. To this he answers, that when

two evils offer themselves, the less of them is to be chosen. If a gangrene should seize an important member of the body, we think it right to suffer it to be cut off, rather than permit the disease to spread over the whole body : how much more proper, then, is it to sacrifice our inclinations to our duty, when the destruction of the whole body and soul is threatened, if we gratify them in an unlawful manner ! However, says Christ, I do not require so much as this ; but only that you avert your eyes from improper objects, and your hands from what is unlawful. The word *Gehenna*, here translated *Hell*, signifies, as we have already mentioned, the valley of the son of Hinnom ; but it was so commonly applied to the punishments of a future state by the Jews, that Christ employs it for that purpose without any explanation.

REFLECTIONS.

1. SINCE the gospel of Christ prohibits intemperate anger, and its usual concomitant, reviling language, let us make it a point of duty to guard against it.—Let masters of families especially, and those who are surrounded with many servants or dependants, be upon their guard ; for they are most liable to transgress.—Wretched is the condition of those men who are the property of tyrants, who may maim and abuse their bodies, or take away their lives, in the violence of their resentment ; unhappy also are they who are under the authority of masters who treat them with the most opprobrious language, without the smallest provocation, or for only a very slight offence ! Let us remember that they are our brethren, possessing the same common nature and entitled to the same Christian privileges, as ourselves ; they are therefore entitled to some degree of respect from us, however inferior to us in talents and condition, and ought not to be used like brutes, or beings of another species. Or, if these considerations are not of sufficient weight to restrain us, let us at least have a regard to our own future salvation, which is endangered by immoderate passion and harsh epithets. Those Christians transgress this rule of Christ, who give to their brethren, who differ from them in less important matters, opprobrious names ; calling them, in their passion, heretics, sceptics, deists and atheists ; men who are as firm believers in Christianity as themselves, and agree with them in all the essential doctrines of religion.

2. Happy may we esteem that man who, when he has been guilty of injuring his brother, can go and acknowledge his fault and ask forgiveness ; he discovers a degree of humility, piety, and true dignity of character which few have attained ; for when men have committed one injury against a brother, they are generally disposed to commit another ; in order to make mankind believe that they had good reason for their conduct in the first instance : but such persons should remember, that while their offences are unrepented of and unrepaired, their gifts and their offerings, their prayers and their praises, are not acceptable to God, who consid-

ers all mankind as his children, and regards every offence against them, as committed against himself.

3. The restraints which Christ lays upon the gratification of the passions, condemning an improper look, or an evil wish, will appear to many severe; and it must be owned that they by no means correspond to the licentious principles and practices of the times; when men think that they incur no guilt, if they abstain from the last and highest act of criminality. But the infinite mischiefs which are brought upon individuals, and upon society in general, by an unrestrained indulgence of the passions, show the necessity of providing some remedy for the evil; nor can any be suggested more easy and more effectual, than prohibiting the first beginnings of unlawful desires, and the use of all those means which may tend to excite them: for this excludes the enemy, and keeps him at a distance: but if he once find an entrance into the heart, all our endeavours to expel him afterwards will probably prove fruitless. Let those who regard this restraint as hard to endure, consider, how much harder to endure will be the evils arising from an unrestrained indulgence of their passions—shame, remorse, and disease in this life, and in the life to come, the dreadful torments of hell-fire. Let them ask themselves whether one is not far preferable to the other.

Lastly; We see that different degrees of punishment are appointed in a future state for different sins, according to the degree of guilt accompanying them; that angry passions, opprobrious words, and evil thoughts and intentions, will expose men to future misery, as well as adultery and murder. This ought to fill us with great alarm for our own safety; for we see that men who are free from gross sins and open immoralities, may yet be condemned to the punishments of hell. Let every one therefore be careful that he do not indulge himself in the smallest and most secret sin, lest it prove his ruin.

SECTION VIII.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW v. 31—37.

31. IT hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.

Christ here again refers to what was said by Moses, by divine command. The Jewish law permitted the husband to divorce his wife; but not the wife to divorce the husband; as was the case in the Roman law. This difference had its origin in the superior rights which were allowed him by that constitution, and which placed his wife almost entirely in his power. In the exercise of this authority, he was not obliged to bring the case into a court of justice, but might discharge her privately, by only giving her a written declaration that she was dismissed: nor was he limited by

this law to particular cases of great offence ; but it rested entirely in the breast of the husband to determine when it was proper or improper to be done. Yet, although the husband was left sole judge in the case, this did not take away his guilt if he exercised his authority improperly, and dismissed his wife for light and frivolous reasons : it only freed him from temporal penalties in doing it. This absolute authority over their wives was committed to the Jewish husbands, on account of the hardness of their hearts, as Christ tells us in another place ; or to prevent a greater evil, the cruel usage or even murder of the wife, if she were inseparably tied to her husband. That there should be no danger of such mischiefs in this relation, we are not to wonder, when it is considered, that the law of many ancient nations gave to the husband a power of life and death over the wife ; and that the Jews had been probably accustomed to similar ideas, which made this indulgence proper.

32. But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, "*adultery*," causeth her to commit adultery ; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery.

The law indulges you with supreme authority over your wives, and enables you to dissolve your marriage, whenever you please ; but do you see to it that you exercise so great a power with humanity ; and be assured that no divorce will please God, which is not called for by the highest necessity. In this language there is nothing inconsistent with the law of Moses : Christ only requires that they observe it in a stricter manner than that in which it was explained by their own interpreters. From a question put to Christ by the Pharisees, (Matt. xix. 3,) it appears, that some of them maintained that it was lawful to put away a wife for every cause.

To divorce for every offence would be cruel and inhuman : a Christian is ordered to be kind towards his very enemies ; surely, therefore, he ought not to be implacable towards the companion of his life. Is she never then to be dismissed, whatever offence she may commit ; even if her affections are entirely alienated from her husband, and she gives her person to another ? Yes. The same equity which had before consulted the benefit of the woman, by prohibiting unnecessary separations, would here consult the benefit of the man, by allowing him to dismiss an adulterous woman. The laws of Christianity have their origin and completion in benevolence, and only require us so far to consult the welfare of others, as not to be cruel to ourselves.—Christ seems to limit the lawfulness of divorce to cases of adultery : for he says, " saving for the cause of fornication," or, as the word is better rendered, *adultery* ; and it is the effect of an exception to a general position, to give the remaining part of the position unlimited extent. But it may be asked, may there not be the same equity in a divorce in other cases, as there is in this, although the offences may be less common, and therefore less worthy of being mentioned ? What if one of the parties should be found forming a design against the life of the other ; or be guilty of murdering their common children ? Are these offences less atrocious,

or less inconsistent with the design of marriage, than adultery ? On this account it has been thought that Christ mentioned adultery, rather as an example of that kind of offence which amounted to a dissolution of the marriage-bond, than as the only instance in which it was proper that it should be dissolved ; in the same manner as when provision is made in the law of Moses for the man-slayer, Deut. xix. 5, the only case mentioned, in which a man would deserve that character, is that of the axe's head flying from the helve, while he was cutting timber, and its smiting his neighbour ; though many instances besides this might occur of a man's being the innocent and involuntary cause of the death of another : in both cases the more common kind of fact is mentioned, from which others of a like nature may be collected.

But it is not every instance of heinous offence that will justify a divorce.—A reconciliation or reformation is first to be attempted ; the persons united to each other are mutual counsellors ; and, where either of the parties has offended, it is the duty of the one to administer advice and reproof, and of the other to attend to it : there must be room left for repentance on one side, and for pardon on the other ; and it is only when these methods have failed of success that extreme measures are to be resorted to.

“ Whosoever shall put away his wife saving for the cause of adultery, causeth her to commit adultery.” The law permitted the woman divorced to marry again ; but it might and often did happen, that the woman who was thus marked with the disgrace of a divorce, was prevented from receiving any honourable offers, and, being deprived of the hope of marriage, formed unlawful connections, which are sometimes signified by the word here translated *adultery*. The blame of this action Christ justly lays on him who, for light reasons, cruelly divorces from him a woman who has entrusted herself to his protection, and who is convicted of no crime that can justify such treatment. Or, if her virtue had not been contaminated, what might happen is imputed to him as much as if it had actually taken place ; for it was not owing to him that the affair did not end in the very worst manner.

“ Whosoever marries her that is put away, committeth adultery.” If a woman was divorced unjustly, there does not appear any harm in marrying an injured person, whose virtue was endangered : this, therefore, is to be understood of those who receive divorced women as their wives, before all methods had been tried for reconciling the parties. He falls into the crime of adultery, who destroys the hope of restoring harmony, by offering a new marriage. Whatever is injurious to the married state, is adultery in the estimation of God ; therefore he is guilty of it, who interposes himself to prevent the return of affection after a little coldness.

33. Again ; ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old : Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.

That man forswears, or perjures, himself, who takes an oath, with an intention of deceiving, or who does not fulfil his promise. The reason why the person fulfilling his oath, is said to perform it

to God, is because he who promises any thing to man, calling upon God to witness it, and to avenge his perjury, binds himself, at the same time, to the Supreme Being.—Hence it appears that Christ here speaks of vows and promissory oaths relating to things future ; for it is only with respect to such that any order could be made with respect to performing them ; and these oaths or vows were voluntary.

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all ; neither by heaven ; for it is God's throne ;

35. Nor by the earth ; for it is his footstool ; neither by Jerusalem ; for it is the city of the great king :

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head ; because thou canst not make one hair white or black, *or, as some read it, "one white hair, black."*

By the law of Moses, Jews were to swear only by the name of the Lord, that is Jehovah ; and all the Jews of Jesus' day looked upon themselves as bound to perform such vows or oaths : but, to keep in their own power, as they thought, the performance of their promissory oaths and vows, they chose to swear, not by the name of Jehovah, but by other things ; such as heaven, earth, their head, Jerusalem, the temple and the altar. When they made oaths or vows to the two last of these, we are told, they said it is nothing, Matt. xxiii. 16, 18, that is, they do not bind ; and probably their opinion was the same about the four former : but Christ here shows that these are wretched subterfuges for a bad practice ; because that in these forms of swearing there was a secret reference to God. Heaven is here called the throne of God, from Isaiah lxi. 1, "Thus saith the Lord : the heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool ;" and it has that name given it because, by being adorned with beautiful stars, and by displaying equable and perpetual motions, the divine majesty is best set forth there ; as the glory of kings is most conspicuous when they sit upon their thrones. The earth is called his footstool, to express its meanness when compared to the heavens. Jerusalem is called the city of the great king, from Ps. xlviii. 2, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion : on the sides of the north, the city of the great king." God was the king of Israel in a political sense ; and the place of his particular residence was the temple in the city of Jerusalem.

The reason assigned for not swearing by the head is, that we cannot change the smallest part of it, not even so as to make one hair white or black. This is a proof that it is in the hands of God, and that there is a secret reference to him in using this form of an oath, as well as in the other instances.

37. But let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay ; *"let your word yea, be yea, and your nay, be*

say ;” for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil, “*from the evil one.*”

Whatever you intend to do or not to do, do it or do it not, as you say ; without interposing an oath or vow in the case ; for, when that is done, it cometh from the evil one, and is a fault. This gives a clearer and better meaning than the common translation, and seems to be the sense in which James (v. 12,) understands the words of Christ, when he says, “let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay.” It appears to correspond likewise to a proverbial saying which prevailed among the Jews, that the yea of the just is yea, and their nay, nay.

These words then, if rightly explained, relate to promissory oaths and vows, and to them only : those of a voluntary nature, and not required by proper authority, are prohibited to all Christians. The reason of this additional command, peculiar to the gospel, of not swearing at all in this sense, seems to be the danger which men are in of not being in the same mind, when the time for performing such promissory oaths and vows comes, as when they were made. To prevent men from forswearing, or perjuring, themselves in this manner, Christ says swear not at all.

But upon the same principles on which Christ prohibits promissory oaths, when not required by proper authority, he would also condemn and prohibit customary swearing in common discourse ; for he who swears often in this manner, must frequently swear falsely, and therefore incur the guilt of perjury.

That Christ does not here mean to prohibit all oaths, even those of a judicial nature, is evident from the connection of the passage, and from the words with which he concludes it : “*whatsoever is more than these,*” than simple affirmation, “*cometh of evil,*” or *from the evil one* : but as judicial oaths were, in several cases, required by the Mosaic law, he could never mean to say that these were immoral. His own example also, and that of his apostles, bears testimony to the lawfulness of them ; for he answered upon oath when questioned by the Jewish high priest. Paul, who could not be unmindful of his master’s words, if he had prohibited swearing in every case, uses such expressions as these : “God is my witness,” “in the presence of God I lie not,” than which no language could contain more express oaths : but they are justifiable, because used in a solemn manner, and for answering important purposes ;—to remove all doubts from the minds of Christians respecting his sincerity.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE see that Christ limits the lawfulness of divorce to cases of adultery, or a few other offences of the same heinous nature ; and whoever considers what infinite mischief would arise to society and to individuals, if this sacred tie might be broken on account of every petty disgust, or even criminal action, what mutual dissensions and licentious desires the prospect of it would occasion between the parties themselves, and what injury it would produce to the children, by depriving them of the benefit of the joint efforts

of the parents in their education, must see the wisdom of the determination. If any complain of the law as severe, and imagine that it might admit of a great number of exceptions, they ought to remember that they suffer for the general good, and that to give a little ease to a few individuals would be to make many thousands miserable. If it should be found necessary to their mutual happiness that they live asunder, which cannot be without much guilt on one side or on both, they may separate by mutual consent; or the party aggrieved by perpetual moroseness or extreme violence, may withdraw from the other without leave; but in neither case may they marry again. This is agreeable to Paul's advice, (1 Cor. vii. 11) "let not the wife depart from her husband; but and if she do depart, let her remain unmarried." It is mentioned to the honour of the Roman people, that they passed the first five hundred and twenty years of their commonwealth without one example of divorce*. The great prevalence of the crime of adultery in the higher ranks of society in this kingdom, and the frequency of divorce in consequence of it, are melancholy proofs of the corruption of our manners, and call loudly for some more effectual restraint than the penalty of a slight fine imposed upon the offender. The Jewish law punished the adulterer with death; and it may be truly said that one half of the crimes for which men suffer death in these kingdoms, are not so flagitious as this.

2. If the marriage bond is indissoluble, except in cases of the highest criminality, this shows the necessity of mutual compliances. Where persons are placed in a situation for life, from which they cannot remove, it is certainly the part of prudence to make the best of it, and since their own happiness cannot be secured without promoting the comfort of those with whom they are connected, to practise whatever may please, and to give up whatever may offend, in their behaviour. This is the conduct which prudence and a regard to their personal happiness enjoin; and it is also enforced by higher authority: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord: husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." These considerations are suggested to those between whom there is a contrariety of tempers, tastes, and humours: but where there is a strong affection, neither the apostolic advice nor the suggestions of prudence, are needed to produce a right conduct.

3. We see that Christ condemns promissory oaths, except when required by proper authority, and that, upon the same principle, he must condemn common swearing. Yet both are practised by many who call themselves his disciples: but what claim can they have to this respectable name, while they violate so plain an injunction? How can they have any sincere regard for the Son, while they treat the Father with contempt, and renounce the first principle of religion, which consists in reverencing the Supreme Being? These transgressors have still recourse to the same subterfuge, in order to palliate their oaths; and if they only swear by their faith or their souls; if they make the most trifling alteration in the

* For the fact, see Gibbon's Decline, &c. ch. xliv. note 124.

form of an oath, by dropping a word or changing a letter; they think it is nothing, and hold themselves blameless: but, as there is still a secret reference to God in all these different forms, however modified, the guilt of swearing remains undiminished. Let us avoid customary oaths, in every shape, as utterly unbecoming Christians; and guard against the familiar use of the name of God in common discourse, as leading to a disrespect for him.

Oaths of a solemn nature, when demanded by the civil magistrate, are not prohibited by this precept; yet they ought not to be too frequently imposed; for this tends to lessen in the mind that respect for the Divine Being, which is the best sanction of an oath. —If men cannot be trusted upon their solemn affirmation, it is a proof of the degeneracy of the times; and to require oaths, only tends to increase that degeneracy. The multiplication of oaths upon trifling occasions, is one of the crying sins of this kingdom; it would prevent much guilt, and answer the purposes of civil government much better, if, in many cases, a simple declaration were admitted, annexing only a severe penalty to a violation of the truth, whenever it was discovered to have been committed. To be fearful of an oath, and careful to fulfil it when taken, is a mark of a religious and upright mind; but to swear heedlessly, and to be indifferent about the performance of what we solemnly bind our ourselves to do, discovers the last stage of depravity.

SECTION IX.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW v. 38—48.

38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

The passage here referred to is Deut. xix. 21, "And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." This is the law which God had given for directing the decisions of the public magistrates among the children of Israel; but the Jews perverted it to justify private revenge.

39. But I say unto you that ye resist not evil, *"the evil one," meaning such injurious persons as are mentioned in the two following verses;* but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

In this and the following verses, the expressions are after the eastern manner, and not to be understood strictly and literally; for when Jesus himself was smitten with the palm of the hand, by an officer of the high-priest, John xviii. 22, 23, and when Paul

was smitten upon a like occasion, Acts xxiii. 2, 3, we do not find that either of them turned the other cheek to the injuring person, but expostulated with him for the injury done. These words must therefore be understood to mean only in general, that Christians should not be revengeful, when they are ill used, and should suffer injuries of a slight nature rather than return them, or even take all the helps of the law to punish the injurious.

40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

The Jewish dress consisted of an under close garment, which covered the body, called here a coat, and of a long flowing outer garment, or gown, which is called a cloak, and was the more valuable of the two. The meaning of this passage, therefore, is ; “rather depart from your right, in smaller matters, than contend at law with such a violent man.”

41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain, “*two*.”

This sort of compulsion was used by the officers of the public magistrates, especially by such as were couriers, who for expedition, seized and made use of the horses, carriages, and sometimes the persons of those whom they met, as they had occasion. The meaning, therefore, is that it is better to do twice as much as is demanded from us, although unjustly, than to seek revenge for ourselves with our own hands, or in a court of justice ; or, in any other way, to transgress the laws of benevolence.

42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.

Christ now proceeds to a new rule of duty, which relates to our conduct towards those who are in want : these are of two kinds ; those who are destitute of all things, and from whom we can expect no return, and those who are afflicted with some temporary calamity, and who only want to borrow money for their assistance : from neither of these would Christ have us withhold relief ; but in giving it, we must be directed by regard to their wants and our own ability.

43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.

These words are no where to be found in the Old Testament : it has, therefore, been supposed that this is a rule laid down, not by the Jewish law, but by the Jewish doctors, and it seems to confirm this supposition that the words, *by them of old time*, are not added as in the former instances, where the law of Moses is evidently quoted : yet, on the other hand, it is not probable that our Lord, after referring in the preceding instances to what had been said to those of old time, that is, to the Israelites when the law was first delivered, should here, without any notice, introduce the rules of the Jewish doctors, or of private persons. It seems, therefore, not an improbable conjecture of Bishop Pearce, that, since in Lev. xix. 17, 18, we have these words, “thou shalt not

hate thy brother in thine heart,—thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” Matthew wrote originally “thou shalt love thy neighbour, and not hate thine enemy,” but that the particle *not* was by some means dropped in succeeding manuscripts. If this conjecture is well founded, our Saviour’s alteration of the law, from not hating to loving an enemy is considerable. The aversion which the Jews entertained for all those who were not of the same nation or religion with themselves, is well known, and was their common reproach among the civilized Gentiles: but although they pretended to justify this by some passages in their law, their interpretations were unfair and ill-founded.

44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, “*revile you.*”

Christ here requires his disciples to bear good-will even towards their enemies, and to requite abusive language and unjust usage, by blessings, and prayers, and kind offices. Yet this rule does not seem to prohibit us from speaking with severity and indignation of the actions of wicked men, whether they injure ourselves or our fellow-creatures. In such language does our Saviour himself speak against the Scribes and Pharisees, when they wilfully misrepresented his words and his miracles, and in the same language do Paul and the other apostles speak of those who opposed them.

45. That ye may be the children, *i. e. the imitators*, of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46. For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye, *i. e. from God?* (*for it is often rewarded by men.*) Do not even the publicans, “*tax-gatherers*,” the same?

The publicans were the collectors, and perhaps some of them, the farmers of the public revenue, which the Roman emperors exacted from the Jewish nation. These publicans were Jews; at least some of them were so; for Matthew was one of them, and so probably was Zaccheus: but because the Jewish nation in general looked upon the exaction of these customs and taxes as an oppression, they had a very bad opinion of these publicans as instrumental in that oppression, and, perhaps, as adding to it by their behaviour. As the office was so odious, it is probable that few persons, except Gentiles or men of bad character, would undertake it: these men, bad as they were, were ready to perform kind offices for their friends.

47. And if ye salute your brethren, *or, as many manuscripts have it*, “*your friends*,” only, what do ye

more than others ? “ *what good will this do you ?* ” do not even the tax-gatherers so ?

To salute, includes every external expression of friendship, and wishing well to others as well as embracing them. Hence it is, that Paul uses it in his epistles. The Jews were ready to offer their good wishes to their Jewish brethren, and to embrace them ; but they thought Gentiles unworthy of that honour ; Jesus Christ, however, requires us to extend our charity to all men.

48. Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Exercise your charity in a perfect manner, as God does, without distinction of friends or enemies. To be perfect in the same degree as God is, is not the thing here intended.

REFLECTIONS.

1. CHRIST has given us some excellent maxims, with respect to bearing and forgiving injuries, which we should do well to attend to. We are required to give up our own rights in less matters, and to bear injuries patiently, rather than, by withstanding the unjust, and insisting upon our full rights, produce quarrels and contentions, which will occasion much greater mischief in the world than the evil that we suffer. Public justice is nothing more, indeed, than that degree of evil which the public good requires ; but we ought not to have recourse to this upon light occasions, and never to gratify revenge, however great the injury which we receive may be. Nothing will justify us in seeking this redress but a desire to recover our lost rights, or to prevent a greater evil to ourselves or society.

But different from these precepts of Christ is the practice of many of those who call themselves his disciples ; who, when they receive the smallest injury, burn with implacable resentment against the person by whom it is offered ; always retain it in their memories ; and watch for every opportunity to retaliate. If they dare not punish the offender with their own hands, which they would willingly do, they fly to the laws of their country, the full rigour of which they are determined to make him feel : or if the offence is of such a nature that these will give him no redress, they must satiate their revenge by endeavouring to take away the life of the offender.

Instead of pursuing these unchristian methods, let every one who receives injuries, whether of a greater or a smaller degree, try himself by the rules which Christ has laid down for our conduct. If he can meet the person who has injured him, without emotions of anger or hatred, and even with good-will ; if he be ready to perform for him every kind office in his power ; then does he possess the temper which the gospel of Christ requires : but if the presence of his enemy kindles resentment in his breast ; if he would rejoice to return the injury which he has received himself,

or to see it repaid by others ; then he is not a disciple of Christ, or is one of the lowest order ; he is but a child in religion, and a babe in Christ. Instead of seeking to punish his enemy, let him endeavour to subdue his own evil spirit.

2. How happy would be the condition of this world, if these laws of Christ were generally observed ! Universal good-will and harmony would prevail among men ; no disputes or differences would arise, or, if they did happen, would be settled without further mischief ; earth would thus become a paradise, and we should have nothing to guard against but those evils which are brought upon us by the hand of Providence, which are light, compared with those which we bring upon each other.

3. Christ condemns the Jews for confining their benevolence to their own nation ; and Christians are equally or more worthy of censure, if they confine their good offices to members of their own community, and do not extend them to heathens and Jews. But how little the precepts of Christ on this head are regarded, the continent of Africa, the islands of the west, and every part of the globe can testify. I cannot help mentioning one particular instance in which this law is grossly violated by us, towards nations who possess the same nature with ourselves, in the same degree of perfection, and differ from us only in colour, in religion, and in manners. On account of these differences we think ourselves authorized to treat them like brutes, and, because we regard them as savages, to act the part of savages towards them. We pay them to wage perpetual war with each other, that we may have the diabolical satisfaction of reaping the fruits of their dissensions : we subject them to cruel and everlasting bondage in a foreign land ; and, that they may be transported thither at the cheapest price, we thrust them into a dungeon, in which we know that many thousands of them must annually perish. Could publicans and sinners, could murderers and assassins do worse ? Yet we pretend that we have no share in producing these calamities ; they are all to be attributed to those whom we have hired ; they are necessary to procure for us, in the cheapest method, luxuries which we can easily do without, and which we ought certainly never to taste any more, if they can be obtained in no other way.

Let us not call ourselves Christians when, instead of performing acts of kindness to strangers, we do them the greatest injuries : let us not pretend to humanity, while we encourage men to sell or to murder one another. Let every one lift up his voice against measures which are so disgraceful to a nation of Christians, and so inconsistent with the rights of human nature : let every one publicly condemn them, that the guilt of them may lie only upon the heads of those who have it in their power to suppress them, but refuse to do it.*

* Happily, at the present day, (1824,) this reproach upon the British character no longer exists.

SECTION X.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW vi. 1—8.

1. TAKE heed that ye do not your alms, "*your righteous deeds,*" for so the best copies read, before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of "*with*" your Father which is in heaven.

In the preceding chapter Christ has been employed in correcting some corrupt interpretations of the law, which had been made by the Scribes and Pharisees; here he proceeds to point out some blemishes in their conduct for which they could find no kind of countenance in the law. These blemishes relate to their almsgiving, their praying, and their fasting, which are all included under the name "*righteous deeds.*" Christ begins with a general caution to his disciples upon these duties, that they should not perform any of them merely with a view to obtain the praises or the favour of men; for that, in that case, they would obtain no reward from God in heaven, who could not approve of actions founded on no better motives.

2. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men: verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

Vain and ostentatious as the Scribes and Pharisees were, they did not literally sound a trumpet before them, when they were ready to bestow alms; but this is a figurative and proverbial expression, founded upon the customs of the Jews and other eastern nations; for as the people were called together to their public assemblies by the sound of the trumpet, Christ, when he prohibits his disciples from sounding a trumpet, forbids them to seek men to be witnesses of their good deeds. The Pharisees, by performing them in public, in large assemblies of the people, or in the streets, showed that their object was to obtain applause from men; nor would they be disappointed of their purpose; they would obtain the empty and useless praises of men; but they would not secure the favour and approbation of God, which was the only thing worth having.

3. But, when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.

This is another proverbial expression, signifying the greatest secrecy, and is opposed to sounding the trumpet. As if he said: When you give alms, let no one know what you do, not even those

who are most intimately acquainted with you : be ignorant of it yourselves, if possible, or forget it as soon as you can.

We are not to suppose, however, that Christ means hereby to prohibit all public charity : for this is frequently necessary, to set before others a good example ; nor is it possible, in many cases, to do good effectually without doing it publicly : but wherever men feel themselves inclined to ostentation in performing public acts of beneficence, or can accomplish the relief of the indigent or distressed in secret as well as in public, let them bestow their charity in this manner. Serve your brethren, in whatever way it may be in your power ; but endeavour to do it in secret, if you can : that your good actions may not be polluted by a desire of human applause.

4. That thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.

Christ here intimates to us what should be the motive by which we are governed, in performing acts of charity,—a regard to the will of God, a desire of his favour and approbation. If we are influenced by this principle, we shall find a sufficient inducement to do good in secret ; for although we are removed from the observation of men, and cannot expect their praises or rewards, yet the Being whom we seek to please, sees what we do in private, and will not fail to reward it in the most public manner, at the last day. Accordingly we find that the judge is represented, Matt. xxv. 31, as rewarding the righteous with eternal life, in a great measure, on account of their acts of beneficence and charity. “ I was hungry, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in,” &c.

5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men : verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

The affectation here censured did not consist in praying standing ; for this was the ordinary posture of the Jews in prayer ; thus we find, Neh. ix. 5, they are called upon to stand up and bless God ; and it was only on occasion of extraordinary humiliation that they fell upon their knees, or prostrated themselves upon the ground. But it was individuals offering up their private prayers in the streets and the synagogues, that they might be heard and seen of men, which he condemned. This is such an instance of ostentation of devotion as we could hardly believe any people would practise in the present day, had we not so recent an example of the same conduct in the members of the church of Rome. Such ostentatious worshippers of God have their true character, when they are called hypocrites ; the applause which they seek from men is all that they must expect ; the favour of God, which they despise, and do not think worth seeking for, they must not hope to enjoy.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Christ is here speaking of prayers offered up for the benefit of individuals, and not of those which are offered up by a society of persons : his language, therefore, must not be interpreted as a prohibition of such united supplications. On another occasion, he supposes that his disciples would assemble for religious worship, and has encouraged them to do it, although they should be few in number, by promising them the presence and blessing of God. Matt. xviii. 19, "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them, to bless them." The reason why the prayers of individuals, offered to God in the presence of our fellow-creatures, and with a view to please them, are not acceptable to the Divine Being, is obvious : they are destitute of every principle which can recommend them to him ; they are not founded upon love, gratitude, or reverence towards him ; they are a homage paid to men, and not to him to whom they are pretended to be offered.

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathens do : for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

We are not here forbidden to prolong our prayers, when we shall see occasion for it : for we find that Christ and his apostles did so ; nor to repeat sometimes that which we earnestly desire ; for Christ did so in the prayer which he offered up for his disciples and future believers, a short time before his sufferings ; he has exhorted us to pray and not faint ; and when in the agony in the garden, he said the same things three times : but we are forbidden to enumerate many particulars in reference to our worldly wants, a practice which prevailed amongst the heathens, who seem to have imagined that if they mentioned many thing to their gods, they should be sure to obtain some of them. In opposition to this practice, Christ exhorts his disciples to content themselves with general expressions of their wishes on this subject ; leaving it to the Divine Being to grant or withhold what he may think proper ; from a persuasion that he knows what will be really useful.*

8. Be not ye therefore like unto them : for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

This is a reason that would weigh against prayer in general, if we regarded it as the means of making God acquainted with our wants, instead of being, what it is in reality, an act of homage, confidence, and obedience in regard to God, by which we acknowledge that all our blessings come from him, and that to him we ought to ascribe the praise. This design of prayer the heathens were ignorant of, or overlooked : they were not, therefore, content with commending

themselves and their affairs to him, in general, but expressed, by a long compass of words, what good things they would have given them, such as long life, strength of body, beauty, victory, eloquence, the favour of the great and powerful : these were the things, the temporal blessings, which the heathens sought of their gods, not any moral virtues. The manner in which these words are connected with the preceding is this : “ What occasion is there for many words to recount those things which relate to the convenience of life ? It is enough, in general, to wish for what is convenient : what will best suit every one, men are ignorant of ; but as God knows, they ought to leave the matter to him.”

REFLECTIONS.

1. THE excellence of the Christian religion appears by its directing us to be governed in our conduct by a regard to God ; for this is the only stable foundation for good actions, and an uniform course of virtue. The world does not want examples to prove that the love of praise is not sufficient to direct men to do right upon all occasions : they who seek popular applause will speak the truth and do good, as long as it happens to be in fashion ; that is, they will swim with the stream, and follow the direction which is given them by others : but when the truth becomes distasteful ; when a right conduct gives offence ; here they shrink from their duty, and, in order to gratify the inclinations of men, countenance them in doing and believing what they know to be wrong. Such behaviour is not friendly to the interests or happiness of the human race, any more than to the interests of the individual by whom it is exhibited ; for men are encouraged hereby to injure themselves : but a fixed regard to God in what we do, will lead us to do well upon all occasions : for in following his will we cannot be mistaken ; it will incite us to do good in private as well as in public, and to promote the interests of mankind, although we may hereby incur their displeasure. Let us therefore always regulate our conduct by this principle : let us set the Lord always before us ; we shall not then regard the favour or the resentment of men.

2. We see that acts of charity were performed by Jews ; and the action itself was perfectly agreeable to the law of Moses, although the principle from which it proceeded was improper. From Christians, whose religion partakes so much more of the spirit of benevolence, these may be expected in a higher degree ; it is our duty to abound in them : let us not imagine that our beneficence is to be limited merely to the relieving of the indigent mendicant, which is what we usually mean by alms ; the wants of our brethren in every form, whether temporal or spiritual, demand our assistance ; nor ought it to be confined to particular times and seasons of the year, but to be exercised upon all occasions, as the wants of our fellow-men arise.

3. As Christ directs us to do good in secret, and pronounces what is done in public, from a desire of praise, of no value, let every man examine himself by this rule : Am I willing to relieve the wants and to promote the happiness of my brethren, when the actions which I perform cannot be known ; when I have no witness to my beneficence

but God and my own conscience ; when I can expect no return of gratitude or praise from men ? Then may I hope that I do good from a better motive than the desire of obtaining a little empty applause, even because I delight in benevolent actions ; because I know that they are acceptable to God, and will be rewarded by him ; then may I hope that my works of faith and labours of love will not be overlooked by him : but if the good which I do is all performed in the presence of my fellow-creatures, and with no other view than to obtain their approbation and favour, then is my goodness destitute of a proper principle, and of no value in the sight of God.—The love of praise is a powerful principle in human nature, and those who have benevolent institutions to support, act wisely in addressing themselves to it : but there is reason to fear that much of the good that is done in this way, if tried by the standard which Christ has given us, would be found not to proceed from the essential principles of benevolence. Let every one who wishes to know his own heart, do good in secret as well as in public.

4. Christ gives us the same rule with respect to our prayers as our charity ; and we ought to attend to it, in the one case as well as in the other.

He who worships God only in public, in the presence of his fellow-creatures, and entirely neglects secret prayer, has great reason to suspect the reality of a religious temper. There is too much reason to believe that he assumes the appearance of devotion, in order to please men ; to gratify a love of praise ; or to promote some sinister end. Those who sincerely love and reverence God take as much pleasure in retiring to perform acts of devotion in secret, as others do in advancing their temporal interests ; and where men feel an utter aversion to this duty, a religious temper is either entirely wanting, or is in a very imperfect and defective state.

SECTION XI.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW v. 9—16.

9. AFTER this manner, therefore, pray ye.

In this sense, not in these words ; for Christ does not direct them to recite his words ; nor do we read any where that his apostles did so, although that may certainly be done with advantage : but he directs them to take the nature and substance of their prayers hence ; and there is, indeed, nothing worthy to be prayed for, which may not be classed under one part or other of this prayer, as its proper head.

Our Father, which art in heaven.

God may be called our Father, as he is the creator of us and of all things : he may likewise be called so, on account of the peculiar and truly paternal affection which he bears to those who serve him.

This great Being cannot be limited to any place; nor is he in one place more than another: yet he may be said to be in heaven, rather than elsewhere, because in that region we see the divine majesty displayed in the most singular and excellent manner; it is in heaven, likewise, that we expect our rewards from God hereafter, at that time when he will show himself in the fullest manner to be our God and Father.

Hallowed be thy name.

The name of God signifies the same thing, in scripture-language, as God himself; so, to call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon God; to pray, therefore, that God's name may be hallowed, is to pray that he may be sanctified by his creatures; that his holiness and, in general, all the virtues and perfections of his nature, may be acknowledged by them; that he alone may be honoured by their faith, their fear, and their religious worship; or, in a word, that he may be glorified.

10. Thy kingdom come.

The kingdom of God is universal and eternal: it is, therefore, the kingdom of the Messiah that is here referred to, which is called the kingdom of God: this, Christ had before declared to be at hand. The coming of this kingdom has different degrees: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, were the beginnings of it. The preaching of this gospel to the Gentiles extended beyond the bounds of Judæa; and, when Jerusalem was destroyed, and the ceremonial worship of the law entirely abolished, that temporal kingdom which God exercised in Judæa, ceased entirely, and the gospel was spread over the whole known world. This kingdom of God continues to make fresh progress, in proportion as the gospel establishes its empire over the minds of men, and will still be extended, until God shall have brought all things into subjection to Jesus Christ. What we mean by this prayer, at the present day, is the progress of the gospel in the world, obedience to the faith in all nations, and the coming of Jesus Christ in glory.

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

This petition relates to the divine commands, and is a prayer that may be obeyed by men, in the same manner as they are by the angels of God in heaven. Christ here refers to Psalm ciii. 20, 21, where it is said, "Bless the Lord all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his who do his pleasure, hearkening unto the voice of his word." It is a prayer, therefore, that men may do the will of God, with the same readiness and cheerfulness with which it is performed by these supposed happy spirits. This petition may likewise signify our readiness to submit to whatever sufferings God shall appoint for us: so Christ says, when he was about to suffer, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. "This comprehensive petition," 'thy will be done,' says Mr. Addison, "is the most humble as well as the most prudent that can be offered up from the creature to the Creator, as it sup-

poses the Supreme Being will do nothing but what is for our good, and that he knows better than ourselves what is so.”*

11. Give us this day our daily bread.

Luke, in reciting this prayer, instead of *this day*, says, *day by day our daily bread*. By daily bread, we are to understand bread sufficient for us : bread is put for food, as being the principal article of food, and may express all the necessities of life—food and raiment. These only does God promise to us in the New Testament ; these only would he have us ask for, and these not in a large store beforehand ; but only so much as is sufficient for the present time : what is more than this we must leave to his wisdom, to give or withhold, as he may think proper. As the child or servant of the master of a family, who is good, and wise, and rich, will not expect to be allowed to lay up provisions in store for himself, for a year or longer time beforehand, but will be content with a daily portion ; so Christ wishes that our prayers should be free from distrust and avarice ; that we should ask for no more than what is sufficient for our present wants ; and feel no solicitude to provide for the morrow. The daily descent of the manna represented what is expressed by this petition, namely, that we ought to ask of God no more than what is sufficient for every day.

12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

What are here called debts, are, in the parallel place in Luke, called trespasses ; which may serve to explain to us the meaning of the word here used. The sense is,—We do not in vain hope for this indulgence from thee, when we, thy sons, after thy example, treat with the like indulgence our fellow-creatures who have offended against us ; not seeking revenge for the injuries we have received, either by actions or evil wishes.

13. And lead us not into temptation.

The meaning of this petition is not that God would not permit us to be exposed to temptations ; for this is the common lot of all Christians ; but that he would not suffer us to sink under the trial. So when Christ, in another place, exhorts his disciples to watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation, he intends to animate them to exert themselves, that they may not be overcome by their approaching trials.

But deliver us from evil, “*from the evil one,*” *i. e. the devil.*

This member of the verse is opposed to the former. Temptations arise from our own lusts, and from the enemies of our Christian profession ; yet both are usually ascribed to the evil one, that is, the devil, from whom they and all other evils are supposed to proceed. We are here directed to pray to be delivered from his power ; or, if the words be considered as spoken not of a person but of a thing, of evil in general, we are then to pray, not for

deliverance from all evils, but for a mind which cannot be subdued by temptations.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.

These last words, which compose what is called the doxology, are not found in some of the oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, nor in several ancient versions; and, as they are omitted by Luke, it is probable, they are an addition to the text, and borrowed from the Jews who used to conclude their prayers in this manner: but, as they contain nothing but what is true and just, they may be used with propriety in connection with this and other prayers.

Amen, with which the prayer closes, is a Hebrew word that signifies truth. When added to our prayers, it expresses the sincerity and solemnity of our declaration. The Jews were accustomed to conclude their prayers with this word likewise; but it was the people who usually said Amen, after the person who officiated had done praying. In this manner was it also used by the first Christians: hence Paul says to the Corinthians, 1 Ep. xiv. 16, "Else, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned, say Amen at thy giving of thanks?"

As the force and connection of the Lord's prayer are in some degree injured by considering the several parts separately, I shall now give you a short paraphrase of the whole.

"O God, our heavenly Father, the author of our being, who knowest all our wants, and whose care and goodness we daily experience, it is our earnest wish and prayer that thy being, attributes, and providence may be universally known and revered, and that the pure worship of thee may prevail over the whole world. May thy kingdom under the Messiah, a kingdom of truth and righteousness, be firmly established; so that thy will may be done by all men, with the utmost cheerfulness and readiness, as it is done by the angels in heaven. Grant unto us as much of the good things of this life, as may be sufficient for our present use: but for this, and all our future supplies, we cheerfully rely on thy infinite wisdom and goodness. Forgive, we beseech thee, our offences against thee, as we, from our hearts, forgive those who offend us. Bring us into no trials, or temptations, that shall be too hard for us; but may all the discipline of life be such as shall exercise and improve us, and be a means of delivering us from all vice, and of establishing us in the practice of virtue! These, our requests, we address unto thee, as the supreme and perpetual Governor of the universe, who canst do more for us than we can ask."

14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

These words are to be connected with the fifth petition in the

Lord's prayer, where we pray for the forgiveness of our sins, and declare our readiness to forgive the sins of others. Christ here teaches us that we cannot expect the forgiveness of sins, in this life, or an entrance into the kingdom of heaven, in the next, unless upon condition of our obedience; a principal part of which consists in showing lenity to those who have offended or injured us. He does not forbid the correction and discipline which parents owe their children, and which one man frequently owes to another; nor does he destroy the force of the laws of civil justice, although clemency be certainly required in enforcing them: but he would have us preserve our hearts averse from all kinds of revenge; not exacting it in our own persons, or by the civil judge; nor even demanding it of God; but, on the contrary, doing good to those that hurt us, and forgiving them.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM this short and excellent form of prayer, we may learn the genuine spirit of Christianity. It begins with good wishes for the glory of God and the good of mankind, before any petitions are offered for ourselves; and even when we pray, each one for himself, we are to include others in our requests: we are instructed to call God our Father, and to say, not, give *me*, but give *us*. We are thus taught that benevolence is a leading duty of religion, which we must exercise in our hearts and in our lives before we can worship God acceptably; and that we ought to be more concerned for the honour of God's name, and for the happiness of our brethren, than for our own particular interests. To these objects let us direct our wishes and endeavours; let us make it the principal business of our lives to promote the interests of religion, and the welfare of the human race; and be assured that, although we make not our own happiness the immediate object of pursuit, we shall more effectually secure it in this way than in any other.

2. As Christ again reminds us of the duty of forgiving our enemies, by introducing it into this prayer, and explaining his motive for doing so afterwards, this shows us the importance of the duty, and the danger which we are in of neglecting it. Our divine Master was well aware that it was a hard and distasteful service: he has therefore bound us to perform it by the strongest possible tie, the hope of receiving mercy from God. When our hearts, therefore, revolt against it, let us remember how much we shall lose by yielding to the corrupt dictates of nature; that if we cannot forgive we cannot be forgiven. While we think and speak of human crimes with indignation and abhorrence, let us beware lest resentment for personal injuries mix itself with our passions, and bring upon us the guilt of malevolence.

3. We see hence the importance of prayer. Christ condescends to teach us to pray: he shows us what we ought to ask for, and what we may reasonably expect to receive. A duty which he shows so much concern that we perform well, cannot be a matter of little consequence; how inexcusable, then, are those who neg-

lect prayer, after Christ has given them such plain directions in what manner they may conduct this service with propriety and efficacy! They omit that which they must know is expected and required from them, and which they know how to perform acceptably if they please. Let those, however, who pray, take care that they do not rest in prayer alone, as if they had discharged the whole of their duty; let them not imagine that by repeating, frequently and regularly, this or any other prayer, their work is done: it is only the means which God has appointed for begetting and strengthening devout affections towards himself, and benevolence towards our brethren, and for hereby fitting us for the performance of our duty to both; if prayer produce not their effects it is of no value, but will deceive and ruin us.

4. This prayer shows us to whom our petitions are to be addressed in prayer; not to stupid matter, to stocks and stones, the work of men's hands: not to a saint or an angel, or a super-angelic being, but to God the Father only; for the government of the world is in his hands, nor has he given it to another. He alone is always present with us, and acquainted with our desires and wants; it is to him that Christ directs us to make them known: to apply to others is to address ourselves to those who cannot hear or who cannot help us: this practice may even involve us in something worse than offering fruitless prayers, in the guilt of idolatry. To praise other beings for mercies which they never bestowed; to ascribe to them excellences which they never possessed, and which belong to God alone; to offer to them our supreme affection—is to thrust the Almighty from his throne; to give to others the peculiar prerogative of his nature, and to substitute a creature in his place. Far from us, my brethren, be such conduct, although only inadvertently; for God is jealous of his own honour, and cannot, without offence, behold it given to another. Let us ever keep in mind this fundamental truth of all revealed religion—that all blessings come from God, and that he alone should be the object of religious worship.

SECTION XII.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW vi. 16—34.

16. MOREOVER, when ye fast be not as the hypocrites, of a sad, "*gloomy*," countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast: verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

Christ is not here treating of the common fasts of the people, such as that ordained by God about the day of expiation, and three others that were added in times of captivity; but concerning those

which any one might impose upon himself in private ; whether for certain successive days, without any fixed rule, or upon stated days, such as those which were observed by many of the Pharisees, every Monday and Wednesday ; to which those who wished to appear more religious than ordinary, added Tuesday and Friday.

On these occasions the Pharisees practised great severities, beside abstaining from meat ; putting thorns under their clothes to draw blood, and beating their heads against the walls. We are not, therefore, to be surprised at what our Saviour here says of them, that they disfigured their countenances, that is, assumed a sorrowfulness of countenance and gesture which quite altered their appearance, and would prevent them from being known by their friends. This method of hunting for the reputation of sanctity he censures ; although he does not prohibit fasting in general as unlawful.

17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face ;

Exhibit thy common face and habit ; for the Jews, as well as their neighbours, used to wash their faces and anoint their heads, every day, except in seasons of mourning. The practice of daily anointing themselves with perfumed oil, which is so disagreeable to our manners, was necessary to the comfort of life, in a country where the heat of the climate produced scents, which could in no other way be counteracted.

18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

It appears then that fasting has its reward, if performed with a view to promote pious dispositions in the mind, and not to obtain praise from men : the mere act of abstaining from food has in itself no kind of merit.

19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust, "*worm*," doth corrupt "*destroyeth*," and where thieves break through and steal :

20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor worm destroyeth, nor thieves break through and steal.

All that follows to the end of the chapter, is intended to guard men against worldly-mindedness, which was the most likely thing to hinder their coming into the kingdom of heaven, or to prevent their continuing in it. Christ seems here to forbid entirely the laying up treasures on earth ; whence some have inferred, that Christians ought to collect for themselves nothing beyond the necessities of life : but he means no more by this language, than that a preference should be given to laying up treasures in heaven, according to the Jewish way of speaking, frequent in the Scrip-

ture. Thus it is said that God will have mercy and not sacrifice ; meaning that he prefers the one to the other ; and in another place, “labour not for the bread which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life ;” that is, not so much for the one as for the other. Let no one, however, conclude from this explanation, that none are here intended except those who deny themselves the necessities of life, watch over their hidden treasure with the most anxious solicitude, and pursue gain by unlawful means, by open violence, or wicked arts : for it is the love of money which Christ has here in view, and which he wishes to discourage. The argument which he employs for this purpose, is taken from the perishable nature of those objects, in which the wealth of this world consists, and from the stability of that which he recommends to our pursuit.—By treasures in heaven, we are to understand treasures with God in heaven ; in the same manner as when it is said that the baptism of John was from heaven, the meaning is, that it was from God. In what these treasures are to consist we may learn from Paul ; in doing good, being rich in good works, ready to distribute, and willing to communicate ; for hereby, he says, that rich men may lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come. That acts of beneficence to the poor are to compose a principal part of this treasure, we may learn from our Saviour himself, Luke xviii. 22, “ Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.”

21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The object of Christ, in the preceding verses, was to teach his disciples to form a right judgment of things : in this verse he shows the importance of forming it ; because as we judge concerning things, so are we affected towards them ; what we esteem of great value, we preserve with great care. If we think our happiness consists in riches, the consequence will be that the desire of getting money will obtain a superiority over every other desire : but if we believe true virtue to be solid good, we shall apply all our endeavours to obtain it ; for the actions follow the judgment of the mind. Hence we may infer how solicitous we ought to be to estimate every thing according to its real worth : for this purpose we have an understanding given us by our Creator, that, by bringing things to this standard, we may discover their value. Following this guide, the opinions which we have already formed, ought to be renounced, if they are found to be false, and none to be admitted but such as, by careful examination, we have reason to apprehend to be true.

22. The light, “*lamp*,” of the body is the eye ; if, therefore, thine eye be single, “*sound*,” thy whole body shall be full of light, “*will be enlightened* :”

23. But if thine eye be evil, “*disordered*,” thy whole body shall be full of darkness, “*in darkness* ;”

if, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !

These two verses are wholly metaphorical : in them Christ is still pursuing the same subject which he had been treating of before, the importance of a right judgment concerning earthly and spiritual things. By the body is here meant the mind ; and by the eye, the judgment, or understanding ; the words may, therefore, be thus paraphrased : As, when the eye, which is the light of the body, is so vitiated as to give no light, the whole body is full of darkness ; so, when the judgment, or understanding, which is the inward light of the mind, or the light within thee, is vitiated, the whole soul is darkened, and the darkness, being total, is, therefore, very great.

24. No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise, "*neglect*," the other.—Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Christ is here obviating a secret objection, which, he was aware, would be made to what he was before saying ; for the covetous man might reply, "It is true that I apply my mind to getting wealth ; yet I observe, at the same time, those duties which relate to the worship of the Divine Being. I am not, therefore, guilty of covetousness." To this Christ answers that a man cannot serve two masters, of opposite tempers, so as to devote to each all the affections of his heart, as well as all the actions of his life ; yet such masters are piety and avarice ; each of them claims the whole man. It is impossible that a man should apply himself, as much as is necessary, to the exercise and cultivation of a pious disposition, and be distracted with a perpetual solicitude about obtaining and securing riches.—Mammon is a Syriac word, the language in which Jesus Christ spake ; it has been left untranslated in the Greek and the English ; it signifies a treasure or riches, which Christ has here personified, as if they were intelligent beings.

25. Therefore, *because the mind cannot, at the same time, be bent upon the love of piety and of riches*, I say unto you, take no thought, "*be not anxious*," for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment ?

Christ again solves a secret objection to what he had advanced ; for some one would say, Be it so, that we are not to labour for superfluous things ; yet I have not that plenty, which may suffice for future life, of those things which nature wants, of food and clothing, one of which is necessary for supporting the body, the other for defending it : when I have gained a competency of these necessities, I will stop my labours. But Jesus shows, in this and the following verses, that this objection proceeds from the weakness

of faith, which prevents us from thinking so nobly of the divine goodness and power as we ought to think : since God is both able and willing to provide necessities for us, although we take care only of those things which present use requires, and apply the whole force of our minds to the duties of piety. This he supports by several illustrious arguments. The first is taken from the superior value of the gifts which God has already bestowed upon us : if God hath given you life and a body, will he not, think you, assist you in supporting them, with the less considerable gifts of food and raiment ?

26. Behold, “*consider*,” the fowls of the air ; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they ?

If God provides for the fowls of the air, who have not the same industry which men have, and are of less value, how much more shall he provide for men ?

27. Which of you, by taking thought, “*by all his anxiety*,” can add one cubit unto his stature, “*unto his life*,” or, “*age*.”

The word cubit is here applied in the same manner to age or life, as, in Ps. xxxix. 5, the word hand-breadth or span is to days—“Behold thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth :” after the same manner, likewise, in our own language, we speak of an inch of time. If all our cares and labours cannot prolong life a moment, they are not necessary to its preservation.

28. And why are ye anxious about raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin :

29. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

The robes of state of eastern princes were white ; which seems to be the reason why the lily is chosen for the comparison. Such a robe did Solomon wear, when he sat upon his ivory throne overlaid with gold, giving laws to his subjects or answers to foreign ambassadors : yet the splendour of his robes did not equal that of the lily.

30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?

The dried stalks of herbs and flowers are used in the east for fire, where fuel is very scarce. *To-morrow* may mean in a short time, not literally the day after the present, when they certainly would

be unfit for such a purpose. The meaning of our Saviour is this : If God cover with so much glory things of no further value than to serve the meanest uses, will he not take care of his servants, who are so precious in his eyes, and designed for such important services in the world ? The word *faith* does not always signify the persuasion with which we believe things that are said to be true, but often, the confidence which we place in the power and goodness of any person ; though no words or promises should intervene. In this signification does it seem to be used in this place ; for although there are promises in the law, relating to the matter of which Christ speaks ; yet he does not take his arguments thence, but from the manifest testimonies of the divine bounty and power.

31. Therefore be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed ?

32. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek : for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Since God knows that ye have need of these things, for the preservation of life and health, he will not fail to bestow them.

33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

By the kingdom of God we are to understand, his kingdom set up in the world by the gospel of Christ, into which an attachment to the world prevented men from entering. The righteousness of God is that which is required in the followers of Jesus, and which is more perfect than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, whose righteousness consisted in living up to the law of Moses and the traditions of the elders. If they sought this kingdom and this righteousness, every thing else, so far as was really useful and proper, would be given them.

34. Be not anxious, therefore, for the morrow ; for the morrow shall be anxious for the things of itself, "*for things of its own :*" sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The word here translated *the morrow* signifies any future time of life. Christ concludes this part of his discourse with a fresh argument against anxious solicitude about the future, namely, that every day has trouble of its own ; it is, therefore, great folly to add to it, by encumbering the present moment with cares about the happiness of our future days ; that would be to render life much more burdensome than it is.

REFLECTIONS.

1. LET us obey the excellent counsel of our divine Master, when he exhorts us to lay up treasures in heaven rather than upon earth. They will be more safe, more durable, and in every respect, more valuable.—Let us now, therefore, apply ourselves to do good; let us labour for our own improvement in knowledge, virtue, and piety; let us employ our time and spend our substance in instructing the ignorant in the knowledge of their duty; in reclaiming the wicked from their vicious courses; in supplying the wants of the needy, or alleviating the distresses of the afflicted; in promoting the happiness of mankind, by whatever means are capable of advancing it. The men of the world may smile at such labours as useless, and as marks of a weak mind, because they bring with them no worldly profit; but they will turn to good account hereafter: if they meet with no reward in this life, they will be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. The riches which we possess in this life, are often destroyed or carried away by the hands of violence, or waste away under the influence of time: if they escape the ravages of time and the rapine of the wicked, they necessarily forsake us at death: then, however, it is that the good works which we perform discover their true value; they are a treasure laid up in heaven, which no one can take from us; beyond the reach of accident, beyond the reach of time or death; they will follow us into another world, and afford us immensely great and everlasting profit. Let us now give our hearts entirely to these treasures: Christ has informed us that it is impossible to serve two masters. Yet there are many, who, notwithstanding this declaration and the experience of past ages, are resolved to make the fruitless experiment; they give their hearts to the world, but presume to hope because they perform a few religious ceremonies and useful services; that, because they preserve the external forms of respect to the Divine Being, they shall be accepted of him. But God will admit of no such compromise between himself and the world; he must have the first place in the heart, or he will not accept of any.

2. From the language of Christ upon this occasion, we may learn the importance of forming just opinions upon religious subjects. He tells us that the affections will follow the judgment; that whatever is believed to contain the source of true happiness will possess the heart; nor is it less certain that the actions of men follow their affections. Here, then, we see that the judgment of the mind is the leading spring of human conduct, upon which all that is right or wrong in the behaviour of mankind depends. It is then of infinite importance, that this judgment should be well informed respecting the nature of duty, and the value of the different objects which men are pursuing: from mistakes here have arisen the most dreadful evils to mankind. Some have been led to place the whole of religion in the observance of external ceremonies, or in certain extravagant, enthusiastic feelings; nay, many,

through a mistaken conscience, have been induced to make it a point of duty to violate the plainest principles of morality, and to be guilty of treachery, cruelty, and every species of barbarity, in order to render themselves acceptable to the Divine Being.

3. How thankful should we be for the various powerful arguments which Christ employs, to guard our minds against anxious cares about the future; he borrows them from the most familiar objects, which are open to the observation of men in every condition of life; from the fowls of the air and the flowers of the field. These are all produced, to read lessons of instruction to us upon these important subjects; let us not indulge ourselves in cares which the whole frame of nature condemns, and which Christ himself has taken so much pains to remove: let us leave such distressing anxieties as have for their object the superfluities or even necessities of life, to Gentiles, who know not God and believe not in Providence: better things may be expected from Christians, and even from those who only believe in the existence of a wise, powerful, and good Being, who superintends the works of his hands.

SECTION XIII.

The Sermon on the Mount continued.

MATTHEW vii. 1—12.

1. JUDGE not that ye be not judged.

Christ does not here forbid all kinds of judging, but only that which is severe or without foundation; as when we impute to men evil intentions and wicked characters, although their actions will not justify such conclusions; or when we censure with too much rigour what is wrong; *that* he would have us avoid, because we may hereby expose ourselves to the just condemnation of God. The caution contained in these words was intended for the instruction of his followers; but had probably a reference to the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were very censorious and uncharitable in judging others.

2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

This is the literal translation of the verse; but it would be more intelligible, and not less agreeable to the original, to render it thus; "For as ye judge ye will be judged; and the measure that ye give will be given to you again." These words were a proverb, in common use among the Jews, to express that as men behaved towards others, they would be treated by them in return. Christ here applies it to the Divine Being, declaring that his conduct towards us will depend upon our conduct towards each other, and, in particular, that if we are severe in the judgment which we form of other men, we must expect no mercy from God. The

sentiment contained in them is the same as James expresses, when he says, (ii. 3,) "he shall have judgment without mercy who hath showed no mercy."

3. And why beholdest thou the mote, "*splinter*," that is in thy brother's eye; but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

It appears that this was a proverbial saying among the Jews, as well as that in the preceding verse. The word which we have translated *mote*, a small seed or a grain of sand, signifies also a small splinter of wood, which, as it is opposed to a beam of timber, is probably the meaning of it in this place.

The purpose of the proverb is, that men are sharp-sighted to discern the inconsiderable faults of others, while they wink at much greater faults of their own.

4. Or, how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the splinter out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5. Thou hypocrite! First cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the splinter out of thy brother's eye.

Those who are guilty of the same vices which they condemn, or of others equally criminal, are not qualified for admonishing and reforming their brethren. Their own vices corrupt their understandings, and prevent them from forming a just estimate of the faults of others; leading them to judge too lightly of those offences which they commit themselves, and too severely of those which are to be observed in the conduct of other men, but from which their own lives are exempt. To pretend to great zeal for reforming mankind, while men themselves are vicious, is also a plain proof of hypocrisy; for they can feel no real attachment to virtues which they refuse to practise.—Let men reform their own hearts and lives; let them first cure the diseases of their own minds, and then they will be qualified for pronouncing upon the nature of the diseases of others, and for suggesting the best means of removing them. Men will listen to the admonitions of such persons with patience; but they will reject with disdain the reproofs of the wicked. There appears to be something peculiarly seasonable in this language of our Saviour, when we consider that it was addressed to persons who were shortly to assume the office of instructing and reforming mankind. It reminded them, how requisite an irreproachable character was to the success of their undertaking.

6. Give not that which is holy, "*the sacrifice*," unto the dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest these, *the swine*, trample them under their feet, and those, *the dogs*, turn again and rent you, "*tear you*."

Christ, in the preceding verses, had been reminding his followers of an important qualification for a public teacher of religion—that he should be free from those vices which it will be the business of his office to condemn : he here suggests to them another rule, which it would be proper for them to observe, that to an unblemished character, they should be careful to join prudence in delivering their instructions ; not attempting to enforce them upon those to whom they were so far from being likely to do good hereby, that they would only excite in them an inclination, and afford them an opportunity, to insult and injure them. It was usual with the ancient professors of wisdom, among the Chaldeans, Hebrews, and Egyptians, to deliver their precepts under figures or parables. An example of this kind our Saviour has given us in the present instance.

By that which is holy, or, as the word is more properly rendered, the sacrifice, we are to understand the Christian doctrine, or religious instruction : the same thing is likewise to be understood by the pearls, which are a fit emblem of any thing that is of uncommon excellence. Dogs were held in great detestation by the Jews ; by dogs, therefore, are here represented men of odious character, and impudent opposers of the gospel : such were the Jews of Antioch, who were contradicting and blaspheming, and who are therefore said to have judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.*—Other Jews, of the same turn of mind, the apostle Paul likewise calls by this appellation, Philip. iii. 2, “Beware of dogs.” By swine we are likewise to understand men of nearly the same character, who do not indeed contradict and blaspheme, like the former, yet, by the impurity of their lives, show in what contempt they hold the admonitions which they receive. It is the disposition of swine to trample under foot whatever may be thrown to them, however precious ; and of dogs to bite the hand that feeds them. The same malignant temper frequently appears in men of abandoned character : they are disposed to tear in pieces those who venture to offer them religious instruction, or to reprove them for their vices. Considering the professors of the truth and the teachers of religion as enemies to their interests, and as reflecting disgrace upon them by superior excellence of manners, they conceive a violent hatred against them, and are ready to employ all kinds of violence against them themselves, or to instigate the common people, or those in power, to accomplish their wicked purposes. This both Christ and his apostles experienced, wherever they preached ; but especially among the Jews. Upon such men he would not have us throw away instruction. We must not, however, imagine that he would have us leave all wicked men to themselves, without attempting to reform them ; for we find that he himself preached to publicans and sinners, and that he had some proselytes from that class of people. It is only after men have been found by experience to be refractory and obstinate, that they are to be abandoned.

7. Ask, and it shall be given you : seek, and ye shall find : knock, and it shall be opened unto you :

* Acts xiii. 45, 46.

We are here shown the manner in which we may obtain those things which are necessary for enabling us to walk constantly in that way which Christ has pointed out to us. He had shown, before, the necessity of the eyes of the understanding being enlightened, in order to direct the affections aright ; he would therefore have us implore light from heaven, and that by earnest prayer. The same may be said of all the other things which Christ has enjoined in the sermon upon the mount : by earnest prayer to God we shall be enabled to perform them.

Asking, seeking, and knocking are only different words to express the same thing, the earnestness of our prayers. No exception is here made to our success ; we are not to imagine, however, that mere asking will procure the object of our petition. From other parts of scripture we learn that we must not regard iniquity in our hearts, otherwise God will not hear our prayers, and that we must not only be worshippers of God, but also doers of his will. Particularly, as we have learnt from this discourse of Christ, when we pray for forgiveness of our sins, we must be disposed to exercise forgiveness towards others.

8. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

In the common affairs of life, the things which men seek for with earnestness and diligence, they may hope to obtain, either from their own labours or the bounty of their friends ; but if they will not seek for them, or do it with negligence, they must expect to be left without them. From the success of men in their temporal concerns, an argument may be drawn for encouraging them to pray for spiritual blessings ; or Christ may here mean to appeal to the experience of those who have actually engaged in prayer, with suitable earnestness and perseverance, accompanied also with the dispositions above mentioned, they having never prayed in vain ; but either obtaining the particular object for which they asked, or those virtuous and pious dispositions of mind which it is the great end of prayer to cultivate.

9. Or, what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, "*a loaf*," he will give him a stone ?

10. Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent ?

11. If ye then, being evil, (*compared with God, who is perfect goodness,*) know how to give good gifts unto your children ; how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him ?

From the well-known readiness of parents to fulfil the wishes and to comply with the requests of their children, Christ encourages men to apply by prayer to God who is the Father of mankind by being the author of their existence, and who preserves for them more than paternal affection. The relation in which he stands to

the human race, and the perfect benevolence of his nature, lay a foundation for confidence, that he will bestow upon them all things which are really for their good. Christ here speaks of good things in general ; but in the correspondent passage in Luke xi. 13, the Holy Spirit only is mentioned, by which we are to understand miraculous powers.—“How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them which ask him ?” One of the gifts of the Spirit was supernatural wisdom, or the knowledge of the divine will ; to this James has been supposed to refer, when he speaks of the efficacy of prayer, (i. 5.) “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him.” To this supernatural wisdom or knowledge, Paul has likewise been supposed to refer, when he prays for the Ephesians, (i. 17,) that the Father of glory would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him ; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.—The gifts of the Holy Spirit, whether they consist in the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, communicated by revelation, or in the power to work miracles in confirmation of its divine origin, are undoubtedly good things, by way of eminence ; and these are probably what Christ refers to, and assures his disciples that they may obtain by asking for them. There appears, however, no sufficient reason for supposing that these were the only good things to which Christ refers ; on the contrary, it is reasonable to suppose, that, under that term, he included every blessing which we are encouraged to ask for in prayer.

12. Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets.

Christ here orders to do to others, that, which reason tells us, we might not unjustly demand from them. We are directed to this method of learning our duty, because, for the most part, we see better what is equitable, when we consider what others owe to us, than by considering what we owe to them. In order to judge justly, therefore, we must change persons with our brethren, and determine to do that to others, which we should expect from them in our circumstances.

“This is the law and the prophets.” By observing this rule, we shall fulfil every thing which is said in the law and the prophets, respecting the duties which we owe to each other ; for as to the duties which relate to the worship of God, they are comprehended in another precept, “Love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart.” There seems to be no particular connexion between this verse and those which go before, and it is imagined that the word *therefore*, with which it begins, is only an expletive, not connecting this verse with the preceding, but pointing out a transition from one subject to another.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM what Christ has said of the necessity of correcting our own failings, before we correct the failings of others, the ministers of religion may learn a useful lesson. They may see, that in order to become successful reformers of mankind, as well as to preserve consistency of character, they must begin with reforming themselves. Vicious indulgences darken the understanding as well as harden the heart, they prevent us from considering the odious nature of sin, or from speaking of it with proper abhorrence. Whatever detestation we may express, if it proceed not from the heart, persons of discernment will perceive that it is affected and insincere. Let ministers of religion, then, remember that it is not a penetrating discernment, extensive knowledge, or powerful eloquence, that will ensure to them success in the important work in which they are engaged; these shining accomplishments, unless they are accompanied with a pure heart and an unblemished character, will not give sufficient weight to their instructions. While, therefore, they labour to furnish their minds with knowledge, and are indefatigable in their endeavours to communicate it to others, let them apply themselves also, with equal zeal, to the improvement of their own moral character, labouring to bring it to a higher and still higher state of perfection. The greater the advances which they make in this work, the greater will be the improvement of their hearers, as well as their own honour and happiness.

2. How engaging is the representation here given us of the character of the Supreme Being! He is the Father of the human race; and we are taught to believe that he is infinitely more ready to assist and bless his offspring, than earthly parents can be to give good things to their children. How different is this view of him from that in which he has often been represented! Surely they must be mistaken who describe him as an inexorable Being, who can only be inclined to mercy by the sufferings and entreaties of a third person! Surely Christ would not have called him "Our Father," or taught us to regard ourselves as his children, had that been his character. Let us cherish in our breasts the most exalted apprehensions of the benevolence of his nature: such ideas are the most just and scriptural, as well as the most delightful, which we can entertain; they afford us the best encouragement to perform the several duties of religion required from us, particularly that to which we are here exhorted, prayer to God; for who can be averse to asking benefits of a Father, where he is sure of never being refused any thing which it is proper for him to have? This idea of God, as a Father, affords peculiar consolation to those who have lost an earthly parent; they will find in him one who is more able and more willing to perform the duties of that relation, than the friend whom they have lost. Let them not, therefore, suffer their minds to be overwhelmed with sorrow, at a calamity which is brought upon them by the hand of a Father, and which he can prevent from doing them any real injury.

3. We are led to observe how happy the state of the world would be, if this excellent rule for directing our conduct towards each other, which Christ has given us, were observed,—to do to others as we would that others should do unto us. We should then have no groundless suspicions of the characters of men; no harsh censures of every trivial failing; no injustice or cruelty in the transactions of mankind; no persecution for conscience; no oppression of one part of the human race, to promote the pleasure and aggrandizement of another; no tearing men by violence from their dearest connexions, to send them into cruel bondage; but the world would be a state of perfect harmony, peace, and happiness. Let us exert all the influence in our power to make it so, by carrying this divine rule into our minds, and regulating our conduct by it upon all occasions.

SECTION XIV.

The Sermon on the Mount concluded.

MATTHEW vii. 13—29.

13. ENTER ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction; and many there be which go in thereat.

14. Because strait is the gate; and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.

By a gate, the Jews understand that which leads or lets men into the knowledge of any doctrine. Thus a treatise, intended as an introduction to the law of Moses, is called by one of their writers, the gate of Moses. When Christ, therefore, exhorts his hearers to enter the strait gate, he advises them to embrace the Christian religion, a thing which it was not easy for them to do, in their circumstances, on account of their vices and prejudices; but which, however, would lead them to eternal life. When he speaks of the way being narrow, he means no more than what he had before expressed, by saying that the gate was strait; conforming himself to the phraseology of the Jews, who often vary the expression without any addition to the idea. The exhortation to receive and profess his religion, is enforced by a regard not only to the happy end to which it would lead, but likewise to the small number of those who, he knew, would be induced to embrace it; where many err, there is the greater reason for caution.

The rejecting the pretensions of Christ, and continuing in unbelief, is the wide gate and broad way which men would find it easy to enter, and which most of the Jews actually chose, although it led to destruction.

According to this interpretation, Christ does not here foretel great difficulties that would attend the sincere profession of his

religion, through all ages, and through every period of human life, but confines his views to present circumstances, and to such obstacles as men would meet with in first embracing the Christian religion at that time. His language is, therefore, perfectly consistent with what is said in other places, that his yoke is easy, and his burden light; that the commandments of God are not grievous; and that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness: it is likewise consistent with the well-known fact that vast numbers embraced the Christian religion, after the death of Christ and his ascension to heaven.

15. Beware of false prophets, "*of those false teachers,*" which come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are as ravening wolves.

The danger of missing the right way, arose principally from their own vices and prejudices, which prevented them from seeing and admitting the truth; but in a great measure also from false teachers, or bad masters in religion, of whom Christ, therefore, now proceeds to treat. The name of prophets is given in Scripture, not only to those who were inspired to foretell future events, but likewise to those who were employed in delivering religious instruction in general, especially if they directed their labours to explain those precepts and doctrines which had been communicated by divine revelation. The false prophets here spoken of were of this kind, either Scribes and Pharisees, who endeavoured, from selfish motives, to dissuade the people from believing in Christ; or Christian preachers, who professed themselves the followers of Christ, but corrupted the genuine doctrine of his religion, from the same worldly views. These persons would come in sheep's clothing, that is, with the garb of innocence, with an open countenance, with fair words and insinuating manners, or, as Paul describes them, Rom. xvi. 18, with good words and fair speeches, while inwardly, or in reality, they were ravening wolves. They serve not Christ, but their own belly, as the wolves do; they make a gain of godliness.

16. Ye shall know them, "*ye may know them,*" by their fruits: do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

If these teachers assume the appearance of the greatest piety, as has just been mentioned, how shall their genuine character be discovered? some one may ask.—To this question Christ answers: You may know them by their fruits, that is, by their works; for those who assume a feigned character cannot maintain it long together; by an attentive observer it will be found that there is an inconsistency between their professions and actions: while the language of humility, devotion and purity is upon their lips, their conduct betrays their pride, envy, malice, a love of worldly gain or sensual pleasure; or if these vices are kept under restraint for the present, they cannot long be concealed. Sooner or later the natural temper will show itself: for this event we may look with as

much confidence as for the most certain and invariable appearances in nature,—for the same tree always producing the same fruit. To think otherwise, to expect good actions where there is a bad character, would be as absurd and preposterous as to look for the noblest fruit from the meanest plant; for grapes from the bramble, or figs from the thistle.

17. Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree, “*a bad tree*,” bringeth forth evil fruit, “*bad fruit*.”

18. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit, neither can a bad tree bring forth good fruit.

The moral conduct of men is as necessarily determined by the disposition of the heart, as the quality of fruit is by the nature of the tree upon which it grows. If the heart is in a right state, the actions cannot fail to be good; but if the heart be corrupt, the conduct must necessarily be irregular.

19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

This verse does not seem to belong to this place; for it evidently interrupts our Saviour’s reasoning here, by introducing an idea which is foreign to the purpose of the rest of the discourse. It is found, word for word, in chap. iii. 10, and, being inserted in the margin here, was probably introduced into the text, by the mistake of some transcriber, at a very early period; for it is found in all the present manuscripts and versions. Slight errors of a similar nature have been observed in other parts of the New Testament.

20. Wherefore by their fruits ye may know them.

Christ had laid it down as a maxim, that the characters of the teachers of religion might be known from their actions: after illustrating the truth of this declaration, by some familiar appearances in the natural world, he returns to his first assertion, in this last verse, which is to be regarded as the conclusion from the whole. The reason why our Lord takes so much care to caution his disciples against false teachers, is not because every thing which such men teach must necessarily be false and pernicious: for wicked men may teach true doctrines; but that they might be upon their guard, and receive every thing which they delivered with suspicion. Where men of profligate characters undertake to instruct others, we have no security that they will not attempt to propagate the most false and dangerous tenets. Such teachers ought, as much as possible, to be avoided: for there is reason to apprehend that, such as the masters are, such are their disciples likely to be.

21. Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, “*Master, Master*,” shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Not every one is a Hebrew phrase, which signifies the same as *no man*. The meaning of this verse then is, that no man for calling Christ, Master, or acknowledging himself his disciple, and professing the greatest respect for him in that relation, shall enter into future happiness; but for doing the will of God who is in heaven. The kingdom of heaven generally signifies, in Matthew, the gospel-dispensation; but in this place it must necessarily mean the state of happiness after death; for to call Christ, Master, was sufficient to constitute any one a member of the kingdom of heaven in this world.

22. Many will say to me in that day, *when men enter into the kingdom of heaven*, Master, Master, have we not prophesied, "*taught*," in thy name, and in thy name have cast out dæmons, and in thy name done many wonderful works? "*many miracles*."

To teach in the name of Christ, is to show forth the doctrines of his religion, and to cast out dæmons in his name, was to remove those disorders which were ignorantly attributed to evil dæmons, but which were in reality natural distempers; the removal being accompanied with a profession that it was done to show forth his power, or that power which attended the Christian revelation. Thus Paul said over the woman that had the spirit of divination, Acts xvi. 18, "I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her:" after his example, and that of the other apostles, certain vagabond Jews took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, we adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth, Acts xix. 13. The reason why casting out dæmons is here particularly specified, is because this kind of miracles was more difficult to perform than any other; Christ himself saying to his disciples, "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." As the power to work miracles was communicated in order to give testimony to the truth, it is not surprising that it was sometimes bestowed upon those who made an open profession of that truth; although they did not frame their lives to the obedience of the truth, but were, as they are here described, workers of iniquity. What the apostle Peter says, Acts v. 32, is not inconsistent with this intimation; "and we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him:" for the obedience here spoken of may not imply a general compliance with all the precepts of the gospel, but complying with the will of God so far as to embrace Christianity. To such persons the Holy Spirit was given, although their moral characters were sometimes highly exceptionable. Of this we have a memorable example in the case of Judas Iscariot, who wrought miracles, as well as the other eleven. Miracles were wrought, not so much to recommend the persons of those by whom they were performed, as to convince the spectators of the truth of their doctrine.

23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

I will openly declare unto them, I never esteemed you as my own. *To know* often signifies, in the Hebrew phrasology, the same thing as to approve. Ps. i. 6, "the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous."—2 Cor. viii. 3, "but if any man love God, the same is known of him." In the present instance, Christ declares that he never knew those who asked for admittance into the kingdom of heaven, because he never approved of their character. As the disciples of Christ were about to commence public teachers of religion, and to be endowed with miraculous gifts, the language of Jesus, upon this occasion, in which he shows them that they would not secure the future favour of their Master, unless their belief was accompanied with a good life, was particularly seasonable and proper.

24. Therefore, whosoever heareth, *professeth to believe*, these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock, "*the rock*;"

25. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon the rock.

26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand;

27. And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

The state of things in Judæa, as described by travellers into that country, will illustrate the meaning of the comparison which our Lord here uses. The land of Canaan is described as a hilly and extremely rocky country; but the rocks are frequently covered with a thin coat of earth or sand. The returns of rain in the winter season are not very frequent; but, when it does rain, the water pours down, with great violence, three or four days and nights together; so as to produce violent torrents in every part of the country. These violent rains in a hilly country must occasion inundations, endangering buildings which happen to be placed within their reach, by washing away the soil from under them, and occasioning their fall. To events of this nature, which must frequently take place in a populous country, where houses were placed in every situation, our Lord here refers. This account shows us how we are to understand building on the sand, or loose soil, and the wise man's digging down to the rock, before he laid the foundation of his building.

By this comparison our divine Master illustrates the difference between a speculative and practical faith.—To produce an active faith three things are principally required; that we diligently consider the way pointed out by Christ; that we ask ourselves, what

internal or external difficulties we shall have to encounter by walking in it ; and that we attentively weigh the greatness of that eternal glory which Christ promises, and fix in our minds a persuasion of the connection between the prize and the road to it ; so as to be satisfied that we may arrive at the prize by this road, but that it is impossible to reach it by any other. The mind that is thus disposed, is prepared for obeying the truth ; he who has done this, builds upon a rock ; he will maintain his speculative faith unshaken by the allurements of pleasure, by the fear of bodily pain, of poverty, banishment, ignominy and death, as well as by the new doctrines of a false teacher. On the contrary, those who approve of the Christian doctrine with the understanding, but have not taken care to lay a good foundation in the affections, by the means above-mentioned, being tempted by the snares of sin, by the fear of impending evil, or the charm of novelty, are easily induced to wish that whatever opposes the gratification of their lust may not be true ; and, seeking anyhow to escape from it, they first begin to doubt, then waver in their profession, and last of all fall entirely away from it.

28. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine :

29. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.

The multitude were surprised at the language of Jesus, because he taught them as one that claimed a right to teach, that is, to give laws, using the style, “ it was said to them of old,” and so on, “ but I say unto you,” and calling his maxims “ his commandments ;” whereas the Scribes only pretended to interpret the laws of Moses.

REFLECTIONS.

1. CHRIST has given us an excellent rule for judging of other men and of ourselves, when he tells us that the tree is known by its fruits. Those who are led to think differently from the rest of mankind, upon the subjects of religion, are often supposed to entertain opinions destructive of all piety and morality ; their persons as well as their opinions are held in detestation ; and they are often treated with the utmost contempt and cruelty by the world : but we learn hence that it is not right to judge of men from the supposed tendency of their principles : if their conduct in life be upright ; if their temper be uniformly amiable and benevolent, we ought to think favourably of their characters ; for a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. This is a conclusion which we are obliged to make, not merely upon the principles of candour and humanity, but upon those of reason and justice. To draw the contrary inference, to believe their characters to be bad while their actions are good, is to violate the rules of common sense and the established maxims of life.

We are inclined to be as much too favourable in judging of ourselves, as we are severe in judging of other men. We find men guilty of fraud, envy, slander, lewdness, injustice, oppression, yet flattering themselves with the idea that their hearts are pure and uncorrupt ; as if wicked actions might proceed from something besides a corrupt heart. Let us never forget that if the fruit be bad, the tree must be corrupt ; if there be any irregularity of life, there must be some disorder in the mind : wherever we observe the one, let us labour to discover and correct the other. Let no one imagine that because his faith is pure and scriptural ; because his religious affections are warm ; and he is strict in the observance of religious institutions, he is acceptable in the sight of God : for unless these advantages be accompanied by an unblameable life, they are but the form of godliness without the power.

2. In the passage which we have been explaining, we have had a striking illustration of the uselessness of outward professions and external privileges : for if they were of any avail in recommending us to divine favour, and in procuring admission into future happiness, who could have greater reason to expect this benefit from them, than those who abounded in expressions of respect to Christ, who instructed others in his religion, and were enabled to work miracles, to prove its divine origin ? Yet we see those who enjoyed these advantages, disowned by Christ at the last day, and rejected with disdain as workers of iniquity. Let us beware, then, how we satisfy ourselves with believing in Christ, or with the mere profession of his religion : rather let us endeavour to convert a speculative faith into a practical one ; opinions into actions. Let us labour to cultivate those virtues of piety and morality which are the will of God and the great end of the Christian dispensation. We shall then erect a building upon the rock, which will sustain all the storms of this life, and bear the trial of the next.

3. From the low estimation in which Christ holds the mere profession of the Christian religion, we may derive an argument to prove its divine origin. To be a believer in Mahomet, and in other founders of different systems of religion, has always been regarded by these leaders as an act of no inconsiderable merit : but Christ has attributed no merit, has annexed no reward, to faith in himself. On the contrary, he has declared that Christians, if they have nothing to recommend them but their faith in him, shall be treated like the other workers of iniquity. So superior has he shown himself to the motives by which impostors are usually influenced ; proving hereby, that his object was to make men good, and not proselytes to a party.

Lastly, I observe, that from this discourse of Christ, we may learn in what Christianity consists, and how it is to be taught. We have followed him through the admirable sermon which he delivered upon the mount ; and we find that he recommends not the strict observance of difficult and expensive ceremonies ; nor inculcates dark and intricate questions of faith ; nor denounces destruction against those who are not inclined to receive them ; but enforces upon his hearers the unfeigned practice of the great duties of piety and morality ; teaching men how they may most acceptably worship God, and observe the rules of equity and charity towards each

other. These are the topics of Christ's preaching ; and the motives by which his precepts were enforced, are those which have most influence over the heart—the favour of God and the reward of eternal life. Those who are ambitious of doing the same good which he did, by their preaching, and of sharing with him in his honours, cannot do better than endeavour to imitate him.

SECTION XV.

Cure of a leper, of the Centurion's servant, and of Peter's wife's mother.

MATTHEW viii. 1—17.

1. WHEN he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him ;

2. And behold there came a leper, and worshipped him, *i. e.* “*did him obeisance,*” *by falling down before him,* saying, Lord, “*Master,*” if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

This leprous man seems to have conceived a very high opinion of Christ : for he considered his power of healing as unlimited, and pays him the greatest respect : but it may be much doubted whether he believed him to be the promised Messiah : for Jesus had not yet openly professed himself such ; nor had a rumour of this kind yet prevailed among the multitude. The appellation by which he addresses Christ, was given by the Jews to any person, although unknown to them. We may observe the modesty of the man ; he ventures to ask nothing expressly, but only declares what he believes that Christ is able to do ; “*If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*”

The leprosy was a virulent disease of the skin, which likewise corrupted the whole humours of the body ; it was very common in Judæa, and in other hot climates of the east. Some centuries ago it was very prevalent in Europe ; although at present it be but little known. Those who were afflicted with this dreadful disease, which in its worst stages is infectious and incurable, were excluded by the law of Moses from cities, and from the converse of men, and therefore obliged to live in the country or in desert places. Their state was on this account most wretched. It was an unhappy man in this situation, who now applied to Christ to be cleansed from the disease.

3. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean ; and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Touching the leper was of great use in this case, as hence it would appear that the healing did not take place accidentally, and that the virtue did not proceed from any one but Christ: it would tend also to confirm the faith of the leper in the expectation of a cure; for if Christ had not intended to heal him in a miraculous manner, he would not have ventured to touch one who was esteemed so unclean. Longinus, a celebrated critic of antiquity, praises Moses for the sublime manner in which he describes the creation of things by God, in the book of Genesis; "and God said, let there be light, and there was light."* The same sublime language is here adopted by Christ; "I will, be thou clean;" and the effect immediately followed his volition. Christ taught as one having authority; and he here confirms the idea entertained of him, by performing a miraculous cure.

4. And Jesus said unto him, See thou tell no man, but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

Christ directs the man to present himself before the priest, accompanied with the offering which the law required in such cases, which was two birds; because he would have him comply with the law of Moses, which ordained that one of the priests, whoever happened to be best qualified for the office by a knowledge of the disease, should determine whether a leper was cured, and was to be admitted into society again. The reason why he tells him to do this immediately was, because Jerusalem, where the priest resided, was at some distance, and, if the report of the cure should reach the ears of the priest before he arrived, he might be induced to deny the reality of the fact through envy, and prevent the leper from enjoying the benefit of what had been performed for him: but if the priest accepted of the offering, it would be a satisfactory proof to all men that he had been cured, and that a miracle had been wrought. Christ enjoins upon him to tell no man of the cure, lest it should bring too great a concourse of people about him, and tumults should arise; or an occasion might be given to malevolent persons to accuse him of seditious designs. It was from the same motive, probably, that of avoiding too great a crowd, which followed him after the miracles which he had before wrought, that he retired to a mountain to teach; for they would not be so likely to follow him thither.

5. And as Jesus entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6. And saying, Lord, "Sir," my servant lieth at home sick, "*in bed*," of the palsy, grievously tormented, "*afflicted*;" *for a disorder of this nature is not accompanied with violent pain.*

* De Sublim. §. ix.

Centurion was the Latin name for the captain of a hundred men : the Romans had soldiers in the principal cities of Judæa, as they had also in the principal cities of their empire in other countries, for keeping the inhabitants in subjection. At Jerusalem, there was a greater number under a tribune and centurions ; at Cæsarea, Capernaum, and other places there were fewer, under centurions. Luke tells us that this centurion's servant was ready to die : it is probable, therefore, that it was not the palsy of a particular part, but of the whole body, which is reckoned incurable, and would increase the earnestness of the request, as well as the value of the benefit conferred.

7. And Jesus said unto him, I will come and heal him.

8. The centurion answered and said, Sir, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof ; but speak the word, "*a word*," only, and my servant shall be healed, "*will be well*."

The centurion knew that he had spent a great part of his life in the worship of false gods, and in the other defilements of sin : he observed too, that the Jews, although he had taken care that a synagogue should be erected for their use, avoided an intimate converse with him. Influenced by this consideration, he thought very humbly of himself. What led him to entertain so high an opinion of the power of Jesus, was a report of those things which are mentioned at the end of the fifth chapter of Matthew, as well as the case of the leper just cured, who had not kept the injunction of silence which had been given him : yet accounts of this nature would not have gained credit with the centurion, unless he had previously entertained just notions of the power of God.

In the evangelist Luke, this story is related differently from what we have here in Matthew : according to him, the centurion first sent elders of the Jews to Christ, to entreat him to heal his servant, and afterwards, when Jesus was upon his way to his house, sent some of his friends to deliver to him a message in the words of this verse. There is no inconsistency, however, between the two accounts ; for it is an acknowledged maxim in law, that what a man does by another, he does himself. All that we have to observe upon this circumstance is, that this is one of those narratives which is related generally by Matthew, but more circumstantially by Luke.

9. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, "*even I who am a man under authority, have soldiers under myself*;" and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth : and to another come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doth it.

That is, I, who am much inferior to thee, being subject to the authority of others, cannot do what I want to have done with my

own hands ; yet I have a hundred soldiers, whom I command to do what I will ; and they obey, according to the custom of military discipline, without objection. How much more easily mayest thou, whose power is subject to no controul, command diseases to obey thy voice, and they shall do it ?

10. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, "*wondered*," and said to them that followed ; Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.

Faith here signifies a firm persuasion of mind concerning the divine power in Christ. This persuasion was stronger in this Roman, than in any of the Jews who had hitherto been healed, because he believed that the divine power would be efficacious, without any touch ; which others did not expect. Even the Shunanite did not believe that laying the prophet's staff on her child would bring him to life.

11. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, *i. e.* *from every quarter of the world*, and shall sit down, "*be at table*," with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Spiritual ideas are often represented in Scripture by images of sensible objects. Thus, the divine powers are represented by the members of the human body.—In like manner, the joys of heaven are described under the representation of an entertainment or feast, celebrated in the night by the light of torches or lamps, as was the custom with the Jews. The meaning of these words then, is this : As this stranger, being convinced of the divine power in me, beyond the Jews, has procured health to an afflicted body ; so, very many of the Gentile nations, having the like persuasion, shall obtain eternal salvation by believing in me.—Christ does not here speak clearly concerning the calling of the Gentiles, which was afterwards revealed ; and his audience would understand him as referring to proselytes to the Jewish religion, who were to be circumcised. There is a particular emphasis in the words, "*sit down at table*," as if Christ had said : All Jews esteem themselves so holy, that they will not take bread with a stranger ; but many strangers shall hereafter eat bread with their ancestors, of whose names the Jews used to boast, while they themselves are excluded.

12. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the Hebrew phraseology, *sons of death* signifies those who were condemned to death, and *sons of the bride-chamber* were those who were admitted into the bride-chamber : in like manner, *children* or *sons of the kingdom*, are those for whom, from the privilege of the covenant under which they lived, the kingdom was destined, that is, the Jews. As the joys of heaven are represented under the image of a feast, which was celebrated at night, the outer darkness represents the condition of those who are excluded from it ;

and lest we should imagine that this was no greater evil than the want of enjoyment, it is added, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," which are symptoms of the greatest agony, arising from the most excruciating pain. These last words are taken from Psalm cxii. 10, "the wicked shall see it and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish."

13. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour; "*from that very moment.*"

As thou hast believed that I am able to perform the cure, at a distance, by a word's speaking, let it be so effected.

14. And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, sick of a fever, "*lying in bed of a fever.*"

This was not so much Peter's own house, as that to which he and his brother Andrew used to resort when they were at Capernaum; being the house of Peter's mother-in-law: for the two brothers had a house at Bethsaida, before they followed Jesus.

15. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto them.

Her rising from bed, where she before lay ill of a fever, and waiting upon the company, were the most satisfactory proofs that she was cured, and that her cure was miraculous: for it would be impossible, by any natural means, to restore her to health so soon, and so completely.

16. And when the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with dæmons; and he cast out the spirits with his word, "*with a word,*" and healed all that were sick, "*diseased.*"

The Jews and heathens attributed the epilepsy and madness, though natural distempers, to the influence of evil spirits, or to the souls of dead men possessing the bodies of those who were thus afflicted. The evangelists, in describing the miraculous cures of these disorders, use the language of the age and country in which they lived; which language was founded upon the supposition of the reality of dæmoniacal possessions.

17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses, "*he took away our infirmities, and removed our sicknesses.*"

The passage of Isaiah (liii. 4) which is here referred to, is thus translated in our English version; "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;" which has been usually applied

to the sufferings which Christ endured for our sins; but we see that Matthew, who, no doubt, understood the original better than any person at the present day, applies this passage to the case of Christ's removing, by his miraculous power, the infirmities and sicknesses of mankind.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the character of this centurion, there is much to admire and imitate. Although a Roman, and bred up in idolatry, he had acquired juster notions of God, and a firmer faith in him, than Jews, who had enjoyed the benefit of religious instruction from their youth.—Although a soldier, he did not think that his profession exempted him from performing the duties of religion; nor had it extinguished in his breast the sentiments of humanity: he pities the sufferings, and is anxious for the recovery, of a poor servant, most probably a slave: for that was the condition of most of the servants of antiquity. We may learn, from this instance, not to conclude every individual to be cruel and profligate, because others of the same profession have that character. There is often more virtue among them than we imagine.

Let Christian masters learn from this heathen to show humanity to their servants. Let them not make them serve with rigour even when they are in health; and, when sickness or any other calamity overtakes them in their service, let them show towards them the utmost tenderness, by procuring that medical assistance which they are unable to provide for themselves, and by affording them every other convenience which their situation may require. If to these acts of mercy to their bodies, they add their endeavours to remove or alleviate the diseases of the mind, which are far more injurious than any bodily distemper, by reproving their faults, and giving them the advantages of religious instruction, they will confer upon them a more important benefit, and deserve much greater praise.

2. How convincing and illustrious are the evidences of the divine mission of Christ! The most obstinate and dangerous diseases, the leprosy, fever, palsy, insanity, all fly away at his touch, or depart at his word. Such extraordinary effects could be produced by no one but the Almighty himself: whoever appears to exercise such power, has God dwelling in him, and working by him. The great Author of nature, who thus alters the established course of things at his desire, bears a public attestation to the character which he assumes, as a divine teacher, and sets his seal to the truths which he delivers. Let us adore the divine condescension and goodness, in favouring us with such satisfactory evidence of the truth of our religion; and let us joyfully receive Christ, as the messenger of God to mankind. If we can withstand such evidence; if we can reject the Messiah, accompanied with all these decisive credentials; God will not want persons to embrace his gospel, and to enjoy the blessings of his kingdom. The inhabitants of the remotest and most uncivilized parts of the world; the negroes of Africa, the Indian of the east and of the west, shall sit down at

table, in the kingdom of heaven ; while we, the children of the kingdom, are shut out, and condemned to weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

SECTION XVI.

*Christ crosses the lake of Gennesareth, and heals two
dæmoniacs.*

MATTHEW viii. 18—34.

18. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.

CHRIST was at Capernaum, on the borders of the lake of Gennesareth, or the sea of Tiberias. The fame of his miracles had brought about him a great crowd of people : fearing therefore, that some tumult might arise hence, he chose to withdraw himself from them, by passing over to the south-eastern side of the lake. It is observable, that our Lord spent the greatest part of his public ministry in the towns and villages upon the borders of this lake ; and it has been conjectured, with some degree of probability, that he did so, because it afforded him a convenient opportunity of withdrawing from the people, whenever, by their numbers, they became troublesome to him, and might excite insurrections, or occasion the fear of them in the rulers of the nation.

19. And a certain Scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

The Scribes were the expounders of the law and of the traditions of the elders : they were generally of the sect of the Pharisees, and the bitterest enemies of Christ. This is the first instance which we have, of any one of them making any proposal to become the disciple of Jesus ; but it was probably with worldly views. He was ambitious of riches and honours, which he hoped to enjoy by attending Christ, whom he had seen work so many miracles, and who, he imagined, would soon possess great power ; but Jesus, being aware of his design, mentions his poverty, which would prevent the Scribe from continuing with him any longer.

20. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests ; “*roosts* ;” but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Man and son of man, with the Hebrews, often denote a man of low condition. Thus the Psalmist (cxliv. 2) says, “ Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him, or the son of man, that thou takest account of him ?” where he designs to represent the meanness and wretchedness of the human race. In this view it is

applied to several of the prophets, particularly Ezekiel; "and he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious house;" in order to admonish them of their meanness and frailty as men, notwithstanding the distinguished honours which were conferred upon them. When our Lord, therefore, applies it to himself, he means to express the scorn and contempt which were cast upon him, and in which he acquiesced. Or, perhaps, it is nothing more than a modest way of speaking of himself: eminent and distinguished persons, who have many occasions to speak of themselves, especially if it be to their advantage, decline the too frequent use of the phrases, *I* and *me*, and choose to speak in the third person, as of another distinct from themselves. Our Lord, therefore, not choosing to speak in the first person, calls himself, with great humility, the son of man.

By a place to lay his head, he means a house; and consequently shows this Scribe, that he was so far from being a person of rich fortune, that he had not a house to live in, and therefore dwelt at Capernaum, in a hired house, or lodged with one of his disciples.

21. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

This was not one of the twelve apostles, but one of those who had attended him for some time, and who is therefore called a disciple. The meaning of the request seems to be; "Suffer me to go home, and continue with my father, till he be dead, and I have buried him; I will then return and follow thee." He hoped, perhaps, that by that time Christ would be in better circumstances; and then it would be more agreeable to follow him.

22. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

That is, let worldly-minded persons perform worldly things; follow thou me; nothing is to be preferred to hearing my discourses, but the opportunity ought to be embraced with the greatest eagerness: a matter of infinite moment depends upon it, the loss or possession of eternal life. The word *dead* has a similar sense in other passages of Scripture: thus the apostle Paul (1 Tim. v. 6) says of the widow that lives in pleasure, that she is dead while she lives: the prodigal son, who repented and returned to his father, is said to have been dead and to be alive again; and the apostle just quoted, speaking of the former conversation of the Ephesians, says that they were dead in trespasses and sins.

23. And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24. And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves, "*began to be covered with the waves*;" but he was asleep.

The great fatigue which our Lord had undergone, in travelling on foot and in preaching to the multitude, inclined him to fall asleep,

when he came on board the vessel ; and made him sleep so soundly, that he was not awakened by the noise of a violent storm.

25. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, save us ; we perish ; “ *we are perishing,*” i. e. *about to be shipwrecked.*

26. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith ? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea ; and there was a great calm.

The disciples ought to have been confident that, while they accompanied Christ, they were under the peculiar protection of God, who would not suffer his beloved son to be lost in a storm. Their fears, therefore, were a proof of the weakness of their faith, for which Christ justly reproves them. When it is said that he rebuked the winds, the language is figurative, like that in Ps. cvi. 9, where it is said that God rebuked the Red Sea, and it was dried up, and means no more than that Christ calmed the sea with his word. The word by which the calm is expressed, signifies not merely that the wind had ceased, but likewise that the surface of the sea became immediately smooth. This was an evident proof that the change which had taken place was miraculous, and did not arise from the sudden stopping of the wind : for it is well known that after every storm, the sea continues to be violently agitated for a long time ; but here the waves as well as winds, being suddenly checked by divine power, stopped at the same moment.

27. But the men wondered, saying, What manner of man is this, “ *what great man can this be,*” that even the winds and the sea obey him ?

28. And when he was come to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with dæmons, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.

We enter here upon a part of the evangelical history, about which learned men have entertained different opinions. Some consider the case of these men as instances of human creatures being inhabited or possessed by fallen angels, of whom the devil or satan is the chief ; others regard them as afflicted only with a bodily distemper, which took from them the use of their understandings, or with madness ; but which was ignorantly attributed to the influence of the spirits of dead men, which were called dæmons, entering their bodies. The latter opinion appears to me better founded ; and, if I mistake not, the present history will furnish us with fresh proof in support of it.

What is here called the country of the Gergesenes, is, by Mark and Luke, called that of the Gadarenes, from a city of the name of Gadara, situated within this district. It has been supposed, therefore, that Matthew wrote originally *Gadarenes*, but that the word has,

by some means, been altered. Upon entering this country, Jesus meets two madmen, whose disorder was so violent that they had broken loose from their confinement, and who spent their time among the tombs, or in one of their burying-places, which, among the Jews, were without the walls of the cities, a place which suited the gloomy turn of their disordered minds, and afforded them likewise some protection and shelter; for Dr. Shaw* tells us, that among the Moors, the graves of the principal citizens have cupolas, or vaulted chambers, of three, four, or more yards, built over them, and that they frequently lie open, and afford an occasional shelter from the inclemency of the weather. This will explain the *dæmoni-acs*' dwelling among the tombs. They were exceedingly fierce, so as to attack passengers who went by the place in which they were: other proofs of their violence are mentioned in the other evangelists, such as their breaking the chains with which they were bound, and their cutting themselves with stones, and wearing no clothes. These are all symptoms of a violent phrenzy or madness. Persons in this unhappy condition, in the paroxysms of their disorder, it is well known, have shown an extraordinary degree of strength, which has enabled them to break the chains with which they were bound, and to overcome their keepers. We have two *dæmoni-acs* mentioned by Matthew, but Mark and Luke take notice only of one; because one of them was probably fiercer than the other, or was, on some other account, the more remarkable.

29. And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?

Son of God, in the New Testament, is understood to signify the same thing as Messiah. The *dæmoniac*, therefore, knew the claim of Jesus to that character; whence it has been inferred that he was possessed by a devil, some being of superior intelligence: for how should a madman know Jesus to be the Messiah, especially when persons in their senses did not acknowledge him in that character? But might not *dæmoni-acs*, long before they were seized with their disorder, learn, in common with others, the high character of the Messiah, then universally expected; and in their intervals of sanity, so very common to persons of a disordered understanding, might they not hear the fame of Jesus as the expected Messiah, which was spread in all places, before they made any acknowledgment of his character? With respect to these two *dæmoni-acs*, in particular, it cannot be esteemed extraordinary that they should be acquainted with the character and fame of Jesus, if we consider that Christ had, heretofore, preached upon the borders of their country, and been followed by crowds from it, who would not fail to publish the miraculous cures which Christ performed, either upon themselves or their friends, amongst which were many cures of *dæmoni-acs*. We are likewise to consider that, violent as the disorder of one of these men was, at certain seasons, he had intervals of sanity, as is clearly implied in its being said by Luke, "the spirit had

* Travels, p. 285. fol.

often times caught him :” for if his disorder often returned, it must have often left him. Perhaps the dæmoniacs or madmen would run into the common opinion concerning Jesus, as the Messiah, more eagerly than persons of a cooler judgment ; the latter being struck by some contrary appearances in his character, such as the poverty of his condition, and the spiritual nature of his doctrine, which escaped the observation of the former, who, for this reason, with greater confidence saluted him under his high character, agreeably to the first impression which his miracles made upon the minds of all men.

In the latter part of the verse the dæmoniacs ask Christ whether he was come to torment them before the season. To understand this, it is necessary to observe that it was a common opinion among the Jews, in the belief of which the dæmoniacs must have been educated, that the punishment of the spirits of wicked men could not be completed till the day of judgment ; and, as Jesus had been long famed for expelling dæmons and exercising an absolute power over them, the dæmoniac might be filled with fear.—Madmen, under their disorder, will sometimes say things surprisingly just : they reason rightly upon wrong principles, and appear raving and sober at the same time, especially on different subjects. Being tainted with the common opinion about possessions, these unhappy men fancied themselves really possessed, personated the dæmons by whom they thought themselves inspired, and spoke as if they themselves had been those very dæmons. They plead with Christ, that the time appointed for the punishment of wicked spirits was not yet come, and seemingly upbraid him with an intention of inflicting that punishment before the time.

30. And there was, a good way off from them, a herd of many swine, feeding :

31. So the dæmons besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

This is a very strange request for a spirit of celestial origin, such as the devil, to make, not at all unsuitable to the character of a madman, that fancied himself to be, or spoke in the name of an unclean spirit, who, after defiling himself with the bodies of dead men, could find no habitation more conformable to his own ideas of himself than the body of the animal here mentioned.

32. And he said unto them, Go. And, when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine ; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place, into the sea ; and perished in the waters.

The disorder with which these men were afflicted was madness, supposed to arise from the possession of a dæmon or dæmons. When any creature became mad, a dæmon was supposed to enter

him, and when the disorder was removed, the dæmon was supposed to have departed : when, therefore, it is said in this case that the dæmons went out of the madmen and entered the swine, the evangelist must mean that the madmen, in consequence of the departure of the dæmons were cured, and restored to their right mind ; and that the swine, in consequence of the dæmons entering them, were infected with rage and madness. He speaks agreeably to popular language, which attributed madness to the possession of a dæmon, or the spirit of a dead man. The truth is, that the madness of the men was transferred to the swine, in the same sense as the leprosy of Naaman was to cleave to Gehazi and to his seed for ever.

If it should be asked, for what purpose this miracle was performed, and how it is consistent with divine goodness to destroy so many creatures at once ; it may be answered, that God, who gave life to all, may resume it, both from men and beasts, and visit them with disorders, for reasons which are unsearchable by our understandings : but, in the present case, there seem to be many important purposes answered by the miraculous destruction of the swine. It was a just punishment upon the owners, who were Jews, for keeping swine, contrary to a law of Hyrcanus, and contrary to the design of the law of Moses, which prohibited them from partaking of them as food. It served to ascertain the reality of the miracle, and to spread the fame of it : for those who were strangers to the dæmoniacs, could not doubt the reality of their disorder or its cure, when they saw it so wonderfully transferred to the swine. This miracle was useful to strike an awe upon the minds of the Jews, and to prevent them from joining Christ from worldly motives. The intention of it corresponds to the miraculous punishment of Ananias and Sapphira, which created a mighty reverence of the apostles, and prevented unbelievers from joining themselves to the Christian church.

33. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city ; and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the dæmons.

So remarkable a miracle was calculated to make a strong impression upon those who were spectators of the event, and upon all those who heard of it. It was a convincing proof of the divine power residing in Christ, and therefore performed with a benevolent purpose. If it satisfied the Gadarenes that Jesus was the Messiah, the benefit which they derived from that conviction would more than compensate for the loss of their swine.

34. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus ; and, when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

It is generally imagined that the people of this country besought Jesus to depart out of their coasts, through dislike to him and his doctrine ; but their request might be dictated by the same apprehension that led Peter to say, after the miraculous draught of fishes, “depart from me, for I am a sinful man,” Luke v. 8. They were

convinced that Jesus was a prophet, and might be afraid that he was come to punish them for their sins. It could not be owing to the incredulity of the people; for if they had not been convinced by his miraculous powers, they would not have contented themselves with beseeching him to leave their coasts, but, irritated at the loss of their swine, would probably have insulted and abused him.*

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE have here a striking proof of the self-denial and condescension of Christ, in submitting to the meanest condition. Although enriched with so many divine gifts; with a power of healing the most inveterate diseases by a word; of commanding the unruly elements; in outward circumstances he ranks with the poorest of the human race; he is destitute of the ordinary accommodations of life: the wild inhabitants of the forest and of the wilderness, who enjoy not the protection of man, are provided with more certain lodgings than he. This poverty was not the effect of necessity, but arose from his own voluntary choice; because he could in that situation, most effectually accomplish the purposes of his divine mission. Let us learn hence that real dignity does not consist in possessing the good things of this life, but in excellence of character, and in enjoying the divine favour. This made our Lord and master, without a house in which to rest his head, or the means of hiring one, more truly great than a monarch in the most splendid palace.—Let us also learn hence to admire the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, although he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor; who, although in the form of God, in the power and authority which he possessed, took upon himself the form of a servant. Let us disdain no situation, however mean, and decline no service, however laborious, by which we can promote the best interests of mankind.

2. In the cure of the *dæmoniacks* we have another instance of our Lord's benevolence: he left the borders of Capernaum to avoid a multitude of people; but nothing could determine him to go to one part of the lake, rather than another, except the case of these unhappy men. It does not appear that he had any invitation to come into the country of the Gadarenes; but he went thither of his own accord, for the sake of healing the men at the tombs; knowing their sad case, from some occasional information which had been given him, or by means of that comprehensive knowledge which he had of things remote as well as near at hand. They who were afflicted as these men were, could not be easily brought to Jesus; and it is likely that few of them had faith enough to ask of him such a cure, especially at such a distance. Unasked and unsought by friends, or by any one else, he, of his own accord, crosses the lake, converses with these unhappy persons, relieves them in their deplorable condition, and then goes back again to

the other side. How conspicuous is the benevolence ; how great and amiable the benignity of the Lord Jesus ! He is entitled to the esteem and love of all. That word ye know, as well as those to whom St. Peter addresses himself, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good.*

SECTION XVII.

Cure of a paralytic man. Calling of Matthew.

MATTHEW ix. 1—13.

1. AND he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.

Having cured the two dæmoniacs, in the manner related in the last chapter, Christ returns, over the lake, to the place whence he set out, the city of Capernaum, which is here called his own city, because he resided there : for Matthew tells us, (iv. 13,) that, leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt at Capernaum. This matter is rendered certain, beyond all doubt, by the other evangelists, who declare that the events which follow took place here.

2. And, behold, they brought to him, a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed, "*laid on a couch* ;" and Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, "*Child*," be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee !

The paralytic man, being conscious to himself that he had brought on his disorder by his own fault, and intemperate way of living, was held in suspense between hope and fear. Christ, therefore, gives him encouragement, by assuring him of the pardon of his sins ; whence he might infer that he who had given him the greater benefit would not refuse the less ; and that he who had removed the cause of the disorder, would remove the disorder itself. The faith of this man's friends was a benefit to him, in the same manner as the faith of the centurion was a benefit to his servant. *Son* was an expression of tenderness among the Jews, as *child* is in our own language.

3. And, behold, certain of the Scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth, "*speaketh profanely*."

To blaspheme is, properly, to speak injuriously of God ; but here he is said to blaspheme who arrogates to himself a power which belonged solely to God.—The Scribes thought that no one could remit sin, except God and the person who spoke in the name of God, and

was sent by him; in the same manner as Nathan was to David, 2 Sam. xii. 13, to whom he said, "the Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." At this time, therefore, the Scribes take for granted that Jesus was not sent by God, and hence infer that he who arrogated to himself a power not received from God, who could alone grant it, put himself in the place of God, and was, therefore, a blasphemer in doing so. They had no suspicion that Christ pretended to be God, but call him profane for assuming a power which could be derived from God only.

4. And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

"Why do ye think that I am not sent of God?" The language of Christ may here perhaps allude to that of Zechariah, (viii. 17,) who says to the Jews, "let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart."

5. For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?

To say to a man who was afflicted with the palsy, which had been brought upon him by his own irregular conduct, or by the just judgment of God, Thy sins are forgiven thee, was the same thing as saying to him, Rise up and walk: for he could not be cured unless his sins were forgiven him.*

6. But, that ye may know that the son of man hath power, "*authority*," on earth to forgive sins, then saith he to the man with the palsy, Arise, take up thy couch, and go unto thine house.

To show you that, notwithstanding my mean appearance, I possess the high authority which I have assumed, but that I mean nothing more by it than a power to heal the diseases which are the consequence of sin, I now direct the paralytic man to rise and take up his couch; which, by divine power, he shall be instantaneously enabled to do, although he appears now to have lost the use of all his limbs. The power which Christ claims is limited to the remission of the temporal punishments of sin, and did not reach to the future consequences of it in another world. That was an absurd and profane claim, left for the pretended vicar of Christ and bishop of Rome: the humble Jesus assumed no such authority.

7. And he arose, and departed to his house.

His rising up immediately, taking up his couch and going home, were evident proofs of a perfect and miraculous cure.

8. But, when the multitude saw it, they wondered: and glorified God which had given such authority unto men.

* "Which is easier, to see the heart and to know that the person is worthy of forgiveness, or to work a miracle?" Newcome's Observations, p. 110. 4to.

The plural number here is put for the singular,—*to men*, instead of *to a man*, by a way of speaking of which we have examples in all languages.

The conduct of the multitude upon this occasion, shows us what opinion they entertained of Jesus: they did not regard him as the Almighty God, dwelling in a human body; but as a man, who derived all his extraordinary powers from God: to God, therefore, with great propriety, they ascribe the glory of them, and acknowledge his goodness in bestowing upon one of the human race, miraculous gifts of so unusual a nature.

9. And, as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom, "*the custom house.*" And he saith unto him, Follow me; and he arose, and followed him.

This is Matthew who wrote this history, and who was afterwards made one of the twelve apostles. The Jews, being subject to the Roman power, paid an annual tribute to them, and persons were stationed in the principal towns to collect or receive it. This was the business in which Matthew was engaged at Capernaum, when he was called by our Lord: it was an office of considerable profit; but he abandoned it immediately, when he was invited to follow Christ. As Jesus had dwelt for some time in this city, and performed here many miraculous cures, it is probable that Matthew knew him before, as well as that he was known to Jesus.

10. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came, and sat down with him and his disciples.

The person at whose house Christ was entertained, is generally supposed to be Matthew; although, from motives of modesty, the evangelist does not mention it. Hence it is that so many of his own profession, or publicans, who had been his former acquaintance, were present. By sinners we are here to understand, not men of infamous character, but Gentiles, of the Roman or any other nation, to whom the Jews gave that name by way of reproach and contempt. Thus Christ, speaking of his own sufferings from the hands of the Jews, says, in one place, Matt. xx. 19, "and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge and to crucify him;" but in another, chap. xxvi. 45, when speaking upon the same subject, he says to his disciples, "sleep on now and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." In the same manner Paul says, in the Epistle to the Galatians, (ii. 15,) "we, who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles."

11. And, when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with tax-gatherers and sinners?

To sit down to meat with heathens, or even with men who held the dishonourable office of tax-gatherers, was what the doctors of

the law prohibited to Jews; and this precept the Pharisees were careful to observe.

12. But, when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole, "*who are well*," need not a physician, but they that are sick.

This is a proverbial expression, in use among the Greeks as well as the Jews, by which our Saviour reasons with them upon their own principles. If you are so righteous as you seem and pretend to be, you do not want my assistance; but these men, according to your own ideas of them, greatly want instruction and reformation. The Pharisees were such great pretenders to piety, that they imposed, not only upon others, but upon themselves. They esteemed themselves righteous, as appears by the language which is put into the mouth of the Pharisee in the temple, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, or as this publican;" while at the same time their hearts were in reality full of hatred, envy, pride, avarice, and cruelty.

13. But go ye, and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

The first clause of the verse is a quotation from the prophet Hosea, (vi. 6,) where God says to the children of Israel, "for I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings;" meaning that he loved beneficence and kindness *better* than ceremonial observances. *Sacrifice* is here put for all the rites of the Mosaic law, among which it held a very eminent place. This language our Lord applies to the justification of his conduct in the present instance. By mercy then we are to understand, reclaiming an offender from a wicked life; and by sacrifice, as applied to this case, avoiding the society of Gentiles, or of other persons of suspicious character. The former was the natural dictate of true piety, which requires from us beneficence towards all men: the other was ritual, arising from the Mosaic law, which, by its spirit, although not by express words, commanded the Jews to avoid the company of aliens from their commonwealth. God, by the prophet Hosea, seems to reject sacrifice entirely: for he says, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice;" but by this, nothing more is intended, than that the performance of moral duties is more acceptable to him than the performance of ceremonies: for it is immediately added, "and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings," which serves to explain the meaning of the former clause. Christ does not, therefore, intend, by the use which he makes of this passage, to condemn men for avoiding the company of heathen idolaters, or of other persons of a disorderly life; (for he himself directs, in another place, that if a brother who offends refuse to listen to repeated admonition, he should be to us as a heathen man and a publican) but to teach them that the maxim was to be so observed, that occasions were not to be neglected of bringing men back to the right way, whenever they offered. Since, therefore, it plainly appeared that he was sent to

call those who gave hope of a better way of life, it was very unjustly imputed to him as a fault, that he kept company with them. Agreeably to the spirit of this maxim, Paul says, 2 Thess. iii. 14, &c. "and if any man obey not our words by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet account him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Christ concludes with saying, "I come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." The preceding words sufficiently show, that sinners are not here spoken of in that common sense which embraces all men, but are mentioned as those who had hitherto lived an irregular life: by the righteous, opposed to these, we are to understand, not those who have nothing of human infirmity, but such men as Nathaniel, who was an Israelite indeed, and a man without guile. Such men do not want such a call to amendment of life as the former. Christ is not treating, in this place, of the whole office committed to him as Messiah, but of that part of it which the Baptist discharged, and in which he himself was now principally employed, to call to repentance as a preparation for the kingdom of heaven. This he could not perform among men of reformed life; it was therefore necessary that he should resort to those who principally wanted that remedy. The reality of that sanctity which the Pharisees assumed to themselves, he does not here assert or deny.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE have here another illustrious example of the compassion of Christ. A poor unhappy man, disabled with the palsy, eager to receive a cure, but trembling with the consciousness of having brought upon himself the disorder with which he was afflicted, is taken to Jesus. Instead of upbraiding him with his faults, or increasing his terrors by threatening him with punishment, he appears to be anxious to dispel his fears, and to banish every degree of solicitude from his breast; he addresses the trembling penitent with all the tenderness of a parent, and is careful to remove the principal load with which he was oppressed; "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." How much compassion is there in these words! How reviving must they have been to the penitent, overwhelmed as he was with fear and shame on account of his sins! Thus does Jesus fulfil the character given of him by one of the prophets; "the bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." Isa. xlii. 3. His compassion did not, however, consist merely in kind words, like that of many others; but it was accompanied with beneficent actions—he cured the paralytic man of his disorder.

2. While we behold the miracles of Jesus, let us, after the example of the multitude, glorify God for giving such authority to men. It is highly honourable to God: he still appears to be the Lord of nature; he alters or suspends its laws as he pleases; he restores the dead parts of the body to life. To employ men, only as the instruments of these effects, is highly honourable to them:

it dignifies and ennobles human nature : it raises mankind to the most elevated rank, when they appear to be entrusted with such high authority. Let us not, however, so far forget the purpose for which it is bestowed, as to pay divine honours to a creature ; to one of the same nature with ourselves : it is God, and not man that we ought to glorify upon this occasion. The work is entirely his, and could be performed by no other ; let us ascribe to him all the honour. Had he done nothing more than cure an inveterate disease, it would manifest his goodness and deserve our praises : but when we consider that this miraculous cure was wrought to establish the divine mission of Christ, and to ensure to us all the blessings of a gospel-dispensation, the value of the favour cannot be estimated.

3. Let us ever keep in mind how much more acceptable, in the sight of God, are the moral duties of justice and mercy than any ritual observances. Mankind have always been disposed to substitute ceremonies for good actions, because they may be more exactly defined, and more easily performed. What an unhappy influence this mistake has upon the temper, may be seen in the character of the Pharisees, who, with all their exactness in observing the ceremonies of the law and in avoiding the company of sinners, were proud, covetous, suspicious, censorious, and malicious. The same superstitious attention to forms and ceremonies produces the like effect upon the minds of Christians, in the present day. If we wish to preserve ourselves from this evil, let us remember that religion consists not in outward forms ; in performing the services of private or of public devotion ; but in proper dispositions of mind towards God, and in justice and integrity, mercy and beneficence towards our fellow-creatures. If these duties should at any time interfere with some religious observance, as will sometimes be the case, let us not dishonour our own understandings and the religion which we profess, by preferring the form to the substance ; by setting sacrifice before beneficence.

SECTION XVIII.

Christ converses with the disciples of John, and raises the daughter of Jairus.

MATTHEW ix. 14—26.

14. THEN came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not ?

The fasts here spoken of were of a private, and not of a public, nature. These were practised by the Pharisees, twice in the week, in order to court applause ; and by the disciples of John, and other religious Jews, very frequently. These disciples did not mean to ask Jesus the reason of their own fasting, with which they

were no doubt perfectly satisfied, but why his disciples did not pursue the same practice, and fast often as well as they.

15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride-chamber, "*the companions of the bridegroom,*" mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast; "*then will they fast.*"

The children of the bride-chamber were those friends of the bridegroom, who were admitted into his chamber, to rejoice with him on the happy event of his marriage. These were thirty in number in the case of Sampson, and are called his companions.* Were these persons, when invited to the marriage-supper, to come in mourning, to abstain from food, and break out into lamentations, sobs, and tears, it would be judged by all very unseasonable and absurd behaviour: but if the bridegroom should be destroyed by a sudden death, on the very day of his marriage, or soon after, there would be just cause of grief, and so much the more, as his death was not expected. Our Saviour here alludes to the appellation which John himself had given to him, calling the Messiah, the bridegroom, and himself, his friend, who rejoiced to hear his voice. John iii. 29.—Comparing himself, therefore, to the bridegroom, Christ declares that while he was with his disciples, their circumstances were such as called for joy, rather than mourning, of which fasting was the usual sign and expression; but that the time would come when he should be suddenly and unexpectedly removed from them, by his death and ascension into heaven. They would then find themselves exposed to hardships, which would deprive them of the regular use of food, or lead them voluntarily to observe frequent seasons of fasting. These words contain no injunction to fast, but only foretel the evils to which his disciples would be exposed, after his death; or that they would then be in circumstances, in which their former habits and customs, as Jews, would lead them to fast. Accordingly we find Paul thus describing his situation, "even unto this present hour we hunger and thirst;" and, in another place, when speaking of his sufferings, he says, "in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often." We also learn that the primitive Christians appointed seasons of fasting, on occasions of solemn prayer. So, when the church of Antioch set apart Saul and Barnabas for their work, they fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them, Acts xiii. 2, 3. Elders of the church were appointed in the same manner. Christ takes no notice, in his answer to John's disciples, of the fasting of the Pharisees, because he had delivered his sentiments upon that subject before.

16. No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old garment: for that which is put in to fill it up, taketh from the garment; and the rent is made worse.

* Judges xiv. 11.

The idea intended to be conveyed by these words, is that of putting a patch of new cloth upon an old, rotten, garment, which, in the end, occasions a worse rent, by pulling away the parts to which it was sewed, than if it had never been sewed on at all. By this comparison Christ intimates, that it would have been imprudent for him to have imposed upon his disciples, who were come to him from the ordinary employments of life, such austerities as frequent fasting; for hereby they might conceive an invincible dislike to his religion, and abandon it entirely.

17. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles; else the bottles break; and the wine runneth out; and the bottles perish; but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

The bottles which the Jews and other ancient nation made use of, were not of glass, as ours are, but of leather, or of skins sewed together. Thus the Gibeonites speak of their bottles, as old, and rent, and bound up. (Josh. ix. 13.) New wine would, by fermentation, burst these skins, if they were old, and dry, and crazy. The moral of this parable is the same with that of the former. Things of incongruous natures are not put together in common life; neither should hard duties be required from young converts, lest it should give them disgust.

18. While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, "*fell down before him,*" saying, My daughter is even now dead, "*was just now dying;*" *for she was not dead when he left her;* but come, and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live, "*she shall recover.*"

Luke tells us that this person's name was Jairus, and says that he was ruler of the synagogue, probably at Capernaum, where Jesus now was. In every considerable town in Judæa, there was at this time a synagogue, where the Jews assembled every sabbath-day, to hear the law of Moses read, and to join in public prayer. Over these places certain persons presided, who were called rulers of the synagogue. This was the office of Jairus. To show his respect for Christ, as a great prophet, and his earnestness in requesting the favour which he was about to ask, he fell down at his feet, as the Shunamite did at the feet of Elisha. He had left his only daughter, a girl of twelve years of age, at the point of death; and he entreats Christ to come and lay his hands upon her; being assured that, if he did so, she would recover, even in these desperate circumstances. The Jews knew that it was usual with God to bestow gifts upon others, in consequence of the prayers of their prophets; a symbol of which favour was given in the laying on of their hands: so, Moses is commanded to lay his hands upon Joshua, that he might by that means receive an increase of the Divine Spirit: so, Naaman the Syrian, joins calling upon God by laying on of hands, 2 Kings, v. 11. This practice of laying on hands seems to have been founded upon an allusion to the manner in

which the Divine Being was supposed to exert his power upon these occasions, by stretching forth his hand. Thus the apostles, (Acts iv. 33,) intreat God to encourage them to speak with boldness, by stretching forth his hand to heal.—As the divine power was invoked, when any person was healed, the laying on of his hands usually accompanied these prayers.

19. And Jesus arose and followed him, and so did his disciples.

20. And behold, a woman which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem, "*the border*," of his garment.

21. For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole, "*I shall be healed*."

This woman seems to have been partly right and partly mistaken, in the sentiments which she had formed of Christ; right, in so far as she thought that Christ was full of the divine virtue: and that as, when the perfume was poured out upon the head of the high-priest, it ran down to the hem of his garment, so, a wonderful virtue was diffused over Christ, and flowed from him in every part: but wrong, in conceiving that this emanation was rather natural, than at the will and disposal of Christ. Hence she entertained some hope, that she might obtain a cure from him by stealth.

22. But Jesus turned him about, and, when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort, "*be not afraid*," thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

The woman hoped to have obtained her cure without being observed, but finding that she was discovered, she came trembling, and falling down at the feet of Jesus, told him all the truth. Christ, instead of reproving her, tells her to dismiss her fears; and, while he commends her faith, endeavours to correct an error into which she had fallen: for he intimates, by what he says, that it was not her touch, but her persuasion of the divine power residing in him, that was effectual to her cure.

During this interruption, messengers came from the house of Jairus to inform him that his daughter was dead, and to desire that he would not give Jesus any further trouble about her; but Christ tells him not to be disheartened by that event, and goes on with him to his house. These particulars are mentioned in the gospel of Mark, although they are omitted here.

23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels, "*pipers*," and the people making a noise,

The pipers were persons hired to play mournful tunes, while others made lamentations with their voices according to the custom of the Jews and other nations at that time, when preparing for the funeral of a person deceased.

24. He said unto them, Give place, for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth.

That is, not irrecoverably dead, as you imagine, but so only for a short time ; so that her death may be rather considered as a sleep, out of which a person may be awakened. So Jesus said of Lazarus, who was dead, He sleepeth.

And they laughed him to scorn.

Knowing that she was certainly dead, and imagining that he spoke of a natural sleep, they treated his words with contempt.

25. But, when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand ; and the maid arose.

The persons whom Christ took with him into the room where the girl lay, were her parents and three of his disciples. The reasons of his excluding others seem to have been, that there might be no disturbance in the house, by the intrusion of a great number of persons, so that those whom he took with him might have no deception of any kind ; that they might be sedate and composed, and attend only to the work which he was about to perform before them ; that they might have a near, distinct, and full view of it ; and that they might afterwards report it to others upon the fullest assurance and conviction. Five witnesses were sufficient for any action ; and, being, together with our Lord, six in number, might be as many as could have, in the room where she lay, a clear sight, without interrupting each other. Five close witnesses, at full ease, are better than forty in a crowd and confusion. This action, then, of our Lord, in clearing the house of hired musicians and other people, is not the least objection to the reality of the miracle.

26. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the conduct of Jesus in exempting his disciples from fasting, we may learn not to be too rigorous in the duties which we exact from new converts, who are just entering upon the paths of religion. A great change must not be expected to be wrought at once : it is the work of time, and generally produced by slow degrees. Those who are eager to hasten it, often stop it entirely, and defeat the purpose which they aimed to accomplish. The same maxim ought to be observed in regard to the young ; to impose hard services upon children and young persons, to which their tender age is not equal ; to compel them to attend religious exercises of great length, during which it is impossible for them to keep up their attention ; to be perpetually inculcating upon them principles of religion, without proper intervals of rest and refreshment, is like putting a patch of new cloth upon an old garment, or new wine into old bottles. It may produce in their minds an early dislike to religion, which may at length grow into an utter aversion ;

whereas, by beginning with exercises and instructions of moderate length, and prolonging them as our children are able to bear it, we may train them up for performing the most difficult services with ease and pleasure. This is an error into which good men have fallen in their great zeal for religion, and by which they have done it, in some instances, no small disservice; but I will venture to say, that it is not an error into which we are in much danger of falling at the present day. We seem to be far gone into the opposite extreme: instead of overburthening the minds of their children with religious instruction, there are many who seem to think it wrong to give them any instruction at all; and to leave them to adopt such principles as chance may throw in their way. An error this, far more dangerous than the former, and from which nothing seems likely to awaken us but persecution.

2. The miracle of raising Jairus's daughter from the dead, affords us much useful instruction. Jesus seems to have been guided by motives of humanity and compassion, rather than by desire of fame, in performing it. Some might wish that he had exercised his extraordinary power in restoring to life some eminent character; a learned teacher of the law; a useful magistrate; or a wise and active member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, who might spread the fame of his miracles in the higher orders of society: but he chooses to raise from the dead, a young girl, who had not attained the age when persons become conspicuous. She had one thing, however, to recommend her to our Saviour's notice, which had more influence with him, than outward rank or distinction—she was an only child, and therefore peculiarly dear to her parents. See the modesty and humility with which this wonderful work is performed by Jesus! Here is no ostentatious parade of his extraordinary powers; here is no summons to the surrounding spectators, to attend to and admire what he was about to do, which is the usual practice of impostors. The multitude are carefully excluded, and no more are admitted to be present than might be sufficient witnesses of the fact. Without further preface, he takes the young woman by the hand, and bids her arise. He offers no comment upon this wonderful event afterwards, but leaves every one to make his own reflections.

3. From this resurrection, let us carry our thoughts to that grand event, of which this was but a type and a shadow. Those who have lain thousands of years in the tomb, will as readily obey the voice of Christ, in rising to life, as she who had been dead only a few hours. Were Jairus and his wife delighted, to receive again a daughter whom they had lamented as lost?—Did they welcome her return to life with the most lively joy, and embrace her with the tenderest affection? How much more fondly will those parents and children embrace, who meet each other after the general resurrection of the dead; when they will be able to congratulate one another, not upon the return of a delightful intercourse which is soon to be interrupted again; not upon the recovery of a life which must be speedily resigned; but upon attaining an immortal existence, and an everlasting union! Let parents

who mourn the loss of children, taken from them in the morning of their days ; let all Christians, who have lost valuable friends at any period of life, comfort themselves with these prospects.

SECTION XIX.

Christ cures two blind men and a dæmoniac.

MATTHEW ix. 27—38.

27. AND, when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.

This is the first time that we find Christ called by this name ; it signified the same thing as Messiah : for all the Jews agreed that he was to be the son of David. Thus Jesus says to the Pharisees, Matt. xxii. 42, “What think ye of Christ, whose son is he ? They say unto him, the son of David ;” and, John vii. 42, many of the people observed, “Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem where David was ?”

Jesus had performed so many and such great miracles, that some began to believe not only that he was a prophet, but the Messiah. The Christ was expected to do many miracles : John vii. 31, “and many of the people believed on him, and said, when Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done ?” and, after the cure of the dæmoniac, we are told, Matt. xii. 23, “all the people were amazed and said, Is not this the son of David ?”

What these two blind men asked of Christ, was, that he would have mercy upon them ; which was a very proper request to address to him, while he was present with them, and possessed of miraculous power ; but this example lays no foundation for praying to Christ to have mercy on us, now that he is removed from our sight, and has ceased to exercise these extraordinary powers.

28. And, when he was come into the house, the blind men came unto him ; and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this ? They said unto him, yea, Lord.

29. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it unto you.

This question, “believe ye that I am able to do this ?” seems to imply, that, unless they believed that the power of God residing in Christ was able to heal them, he would not confer upon them the benefit which they asked : but, perhaps, it was proposed to them, in order that, by an open declaration of their faith in him, they

might produce some effect upon those who heard it, and incline them to believe in him likewise.

30. And their eyes were opened ; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

That is, Let no man know that I have healed you in a miraculous manner : for every one must know that they had been once blind, and now saw.

Jesus seems to have commanded secrecy here, because his time of suffering was not yet come : in other places, the same thing is enjoined upon the persons healed, lest the rulers amongst the Jews should conspire and put him to death, before he had given sufficient proofs of his divine mission, and had sufficiently instructed his disciples in his doctrine.

31. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

These two men seem to have been actuated by a principle which, we see, governs human nature every day. Where any thing is communicated with an injunction of secrecy, it only increases men's eagerness to divulge it ; or where any thing to which they are previously inclined is prohibited, they become the more impatient, in consequence of the restraint, and more anxious to gratify their inclinations.

32. As they went out, behold they brought to him a dumb man, possessed with a dæmon.

In the present case the dæmoniac, or madman, was dumb ; and his dumbness probably arose not from any natural defect in the organs of speech, but from the turn of his disorder, which was that species of madness called melancholy ; of which taciturnity, or dumbness, is a very commot effect. This symptom, the ancients, who considered melancholy as the effect of possession, expressed by saying that the patient had a dumb spirit ; hereby distinguishing this dumbness from that which is owing to natural causes, or to a defect in the organs of speech.

33. And when the dæmon was cast out, the dumb spake.

When the madness imputed to the dæmon was cured, the man began to speak. The language in which the evangelists speak of these dæmoniacs was the popular language of the age, and, therefore, they say that the dæmon was cast out ; although the man was not in reality possessed by any such being. Their using such words gives no sanction to the doctrines of real possessions.

And the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

The astonishment of the multitudes arose not merely from the cure of the dæmoniac, (for we have already read of several instances of the like cure performed before,) but from the greatness and the number of the miracles which had been wrought ; for, in the

same afternoon, Jesus raised from the dead Jairus's daughter; healed the woman that had the issue of blood; restored sight to two blind men, and cured a dæmoniac. So many miracles, of such a surprising nature, in so short a time, were never known to be performed before; not even by Moses.

34. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out dæmons through the prince of the dæmons.

This prince of the dæmons is, in other places, called Beelzebub. Those who believe the reality of possessions, suppose this to be the devil; but there seems to be no foundation for that notion: for the name by which the devil is called in the apocryphal writings of the Jews is Asmodæus,* and never Beelzebub. The history of the Old Testament will help us to understand, who this prince of dæmons, called by the name of Beelzebub, was. We are there told, 2 Kings, i. 2. that Ahaziah, when ill, sent messengers; and said unto them, "Go, inquire of Beelzebub, the God of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease." From this passage, it clearly appears that Beelzebub was a God of the Philistines, and had a temple and oracle at Ekron. Now Beelzebub, being a heathen dæmon or deity, could be no other than a deified human spirit; for such were all the heathen dæmons, who were the more immediate objects of the public established worship. This heathen God had, for some reason or other, which we are not acquainted with, acquired the distinction of being the prince of the possessing dæmons, and was regarded in this light by the Pharisees. Not being able to deny the reality of the miracle performed upon the dæmoniac, they endeavoured to destroy the evidence which it afforded of the divine mission of Christ, by attributing the cure, not to the power of God which resided in Christ, but to some connexion which he maintained with the prince of the possessing dæmons, who, having authority over them all, enabled Jesus to cast out whom he pleased. Christ gives no reply to this foolish objection which the Pharisees made to his miracles, at present; but we find that when they renewed it, upon a similar occasion, he said, "a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand;" that is, a prince and his subjects cannot be supposed at variance with each other, and carrying on opposite designs: for if they are, it will prove the destruction of the kingdom.

35. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Synagogues were, for the most part, confined to cities, and all that were within the territories of those cities resorted to them: but it may be collected from this verse that some were found in the larger and the more populous villages. Christ took the advantage which these buildings afforded him, wherever there were any, to preach to the people.

* Tobit. iii. 8.

36. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad ; “ *because they were scattered abroad and neglected,*” as sheep having no shepherd.

The Jews had many teachers amongst them ; Scribes, and Pharisees and lawyers ; but these men were more attentive to their own interests and to their own private emolument, than to the benefit of the people. The teachers were divided into different sects ; each of them equally departing from the Scriptures, and substituting human interpretations for the divine law. When Jesus beheld the crowds of people that followed him from all parts of the country, and considered the ignorance and darkness into which they were sunk, the scene before his eyes reminded him of a flock of sheep, scattered abroad without any shepherd to take care of them, and filled his benevolent mind with compassion. This is an image often made use of in Scripture, to express the most deplorable state. Thus Moses, Numb. xxvii. 16, 17, entreats God, “ to set a man over the congregation which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in ; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd.” If the shepherd seek only his own benefit, and not that of the flock, it is the same thing with regard to them, as if there were no shepherd : on the other hand, the good shepherd seeks the benefit of his flock, in preference to his own advantage, and even hazards his life to promote it. “ I am the good shepherd,” says Christ ; “ the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father ; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” John x. 11, 13.

37. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous ; but the labourers are few.

Christ now passes from the image of sheep to that of a field covered with corn ready to be cut down. The multitude which followed him led him to make this reflection. He compares Judæa and the neighbouring countries to a field covered with ears of corn, already ripe, and in which nothing is wanting but reapers to put in the sickle, and to reap.

38. Pray ye, therefore, the lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

By sending forth labourers is not here meant, raising up teachers, in the common course of Providence, for the instruction of mankind ; but conferring special powers, gifts, and commands upon men, and sending them out to teach ; in the same manner as Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and others were formerly sent. The account in the next chapter admirably connects with these words : for there Christ does that very thing with his disciples, which he directs them here to pray for.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the earnestness with which these two blind men entreat Christ to have mercy upon them, we may learn the value of the faculty of vision which they had lost. It is the noblest and most important of the senses with which we are furnished; not only necessary to guard us from danger, and to direct our steps in pursuing and performing the business of life; but likewise the source of much of our knowledge, and of some of the most delightful pleasures. It is this which enables us to behold the charming light of the sun, and the beautiful face of nature: the pleasing verdure with which the earth is every where adorned; the variegated prospect; the wide-extended plain; the towering mountain; the flowing stream, and the majestic ocean. It is with this sense that we contemplate the lofty canopy of heaven, and discern in it distant worlds, at rest or in motion, beautiful to the eye, and conveying to the mind illustrious evidence of the power and universal presence of the Deity. Nor let it be reckoned the least of the pleasures which the sight affords us, that by it we discern the countenances of men, and the smiles of friendship and affection. How thankful should we be to God, for bestowing upon us at first, and for continuing to us without interruption, the use of so important a faculty; especially when we consider the delicate structure of the eye, and the numerous injuries to which it is liable! How ready should we be to pity and show mercy to those who are deprived of sight, and condemned to spend their days in perpetual darkness, by endeavouring to alleviate the wretchedness of their condition, if we cannot entirely remove the cause of it, as Christ did!

2. Let us learn to be thankful also for the gift of speech. It is that faculty of our natures which distinguishes us from other creatures; which raises men above brutes; and renders them like God; it affords us the means of doing much good: by it we may enlighten the ignorant mind, reprove and reclaim the wicked, direct the perplexed, soften the calamities of the distressed, inculcate upon men the important principles of piety and morality, and lead them in the way to present and eternal happiness. Such are the important benefits which we may confer upon mankind by the right use of speech. How painful is it to reflect that what might be rendered productive of so much good, is often perverted to purposes of quite an opposite nature! "The tongue," James tells us, "is a fire; a world of iniquity: it setteth on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire of hell." Such is the tongue, when employed to convey falsehood instead of truth; to blaspheme God rather than to bless him; to curse ourselves, or our brethren, instead of praying for them. Rather than my tongue shall be applied to such purposes, will the Christian say, let it cleave to the roof of my mouth: let my lips be closed in perpetual silence: let me be dumb as this dæmoniac, and may God never open my mouth! While my tongue can move, I will employ it to praise the author of my being, and to thank him for his various benefits: I will employ it to

impart knowledge to my brethren ; to pray for their welfare ; even for the welfare of those who wish evil to me, and are ready to do it.

3. From the example of Christ, we may learn how we ought to behave towards those who are ignorant, and destitute of proper instructors. He beheld them with compassion ; he undertook to instruct them himself, and he directed his disciples to pray, that God would send forth other labourers to this great work.—Let us endeavour to imitate his conduct : there is much ignorance and wickedness still among mankind : even in a Christian country, men are still destitute of just notions of religion ; their minds are depraved, and their morals corrupt : but let us not look down upon them with contempt, much less with abhorrence. They are the objects of compassion rather than of indignation. Unhappy, deluded men, who have fallen into this dreadful condition, through their own folly, or the negligence of those whose duty it was to instruct them ! Let us pray that God would raise up fit instruments for enlightening and reforming mankind : let each of us do what he can to forward this important work, with his own hands : for all men are capable of being made wiser and better. Here is a large field, which will furnish work enough for every one. If the labourers are few, it will be a greater honour to those who are employed : if they meet with many adversaries, who endeavour to oppose their benevolent designs, it is no more than the first labourers in this field, than Christ and his apostles experienced ; it is no more than what has happened to every other teacher, who has succeeded them in the same work of enlightening and reforming mankind.

SECTION XX.

Mission of the twelve Apostles.

MATTHEW x. 1—15.

1. AND, when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against, “*over,*” unclean spirits, to cast them out ; and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease.

Christ, having beheld the multitude with compassion, because they were ignorant, and destitute of proper instructors, immediately adopts a method for removing this evil, by sending forth his disciples to preach. The persons whom he chose for this purpose, were such as had been more familiar with him than the rest, and who had been his daily companions. In order that they might excite attention to their doctrine, and be able to prove their divine mission, Christ endowed them with the power of working miracles. In this communication the dignity and authority of Christ appear eminently conspicuous. Many of the other prophets worked

miracles; but they could not, at pleasure, grant the power of miracles to others; not even Moses to Joshua, nor Elijah to Elisha. One of the miracles which they are authorized to perform is that of casting out unclean spirits. They were the spirits of wicked men, who, after their death, were supposed to torment the living. "These are called evil and unclean; but it is not certain whether these epithets were given them to express their personal dispositions, or only those effects which they were supposed to produce. The word *evil* might be applied to a dæmon, on account of the pain and misery which he was thought to create; and it is possible that dæmons might be called unclean, because persons under that melancholy and maniacal disorder, of which they were the reputed authors, avoided the society of men, and were continually defiling themselves with objects esteemed by the Jews unclean. This was the case of the man who lived amongst the tombs, by which he contracted the greatest pollution."*

2. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter,

Simon is first mentioned because he was called first: the surname of Peter was given him by Christ.

And Andrew his brother; James the son of Zeb-edee, and John his brother; *these were all fishermen.*

3. Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, who was also called Didymus, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphæus, and Lebbæus, whose surname was Thaddæus.

This last is the name which is called by Luke, (vi. 16,) Judas; and the difference probably arose from nothing more than some peculiarity in the pronunciation.

4. Simon the Canaanite,

It is probable that this Simon derived his name from the place of his residence, Cana in Galilee, where Christ wrought his first miracle, by turning water into wine, and that it was originally written the *Canaite*, and not the *Canaanite*.

And Judas Iscariot, *i.e. a man born in Cæriothe, or Keriote*, who also betrayed him.

It was of considerable importance that the names of these persons should be known, by whose concurring testimony the truth was to be established; especially, as there were not wanting persons who falsely assumed the name of apostles.

5. These twelve Jesus sent forth.

* Farmer on Dæmoniacs, p. 61.

Christ, being about to establish a spiritual kingdom, borrows a model from the Jewish republic, in order that it might more clearly appear that the promises which had been made to the Jews of an eternal kingdom were substantially fulfilled in him: for, as there were twelve tribes, so, there were twelve heads of tribes, of extraordinary dignity, to which the words of Christ refer, Matt. xix. 26. "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." These twelve persons were called *apostles*, because they were sent out to preach; apostle signifying a person that is sent. They were also called *disciples*, because they were taught by Christ.

And commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, "*Go not towards the Gentiles:*" and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not.

Christ does not prohibit the apostles from going into the country of Samaria; for it lay in the way of those who went from Galilee to Jerusalem; but he forbids them to enter their towns, as well as the country of the Gentiles, lest it should appear that this embassy was instituted for the sake of the Samaritans, and hereby give offence to the Jews, between whom and the Samaritans there was an irreconcilable hatred. It was likewise an illustrious proof of the precedence which he allowed to the Jews, that he made it his first care to instruct them: a practice which was also strictly followed by his apostles, after his resurrection.

6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

It is to them that Christ professes that he was particularly sent: Matt. xv. 24, he said to the woman of Canaan, "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Paul likewise tells us, Rom. xv. 8, "now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision, for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers;" that is, that there might appear to be a full confidence in the promises which God made to the ancestors of the Jews. Jesus Christ conferred no benefits upon foreigners, except occasionally; waiting patiently the conversion of the Jews, that other nations might afterwards be converted by their means.

7. And, as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

It is observable that the twelve apostles, upon this mission, were not to declare Jesus to be the Messiah, probably for fear of giving alarm to the Jews; but the subject of their proclamation was to be that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, which, if it be compared with the same language from John the Baptist, and from Jesus Christ when he first entered upon his ministry, will be found to be nothing more than an exhortation to a better life, that they might be prepared for this new kingdom that was about to be established,

and be disposed to receive Jesus as the Messiah, whenever he should appear.

8. Heal the sick ; cleanse the lepers ; raise the dead ; cast out dæmons : freely ye have received, freely give.

Physicians acquire the knowledge of diseases, and of the means of curing them, after much expense of time and money ; but you have received this power of healing disorders, in one moment, without any expense of yours : therefore exercise this healing power towards others, without stipulating for any money or reward. Christ here shows that what he required was no grievous or unjust thing, that these acts of power should be performed without reward ; which he does, by reminding the apostles in what manner the powers were bestowed. Nevertheless, to receive voluntary gifts for these acts has nothing in it naturally base : those who consulted the prophets were accustomed to reward them with small presents ; yet they did not always receive them, but judged what was proper to be done by the circumstances of the persons and the case. Thus Elisha says to his servant, when he took a present from Naaman, the Syrian, “ was this a time for receiving silver or garments ? ” and Daniel, (v. 17,) refused to receive any reward from king Belshazzar. Christ, who saw that it would detract much from the authority of the gospel, and expose his disciples to many calumnies, if they received rewards for those performances which were only intended to attest the truth and divine origin of particular doctrines, prohibited not only all disgraceful contracts from being made, for the exercise of these extraordinary powers ; but all kind of gain from being sought from things of this nature, and even from the work of teaching others. This rule was religiously observed by the true apostles, and their immediate successors. At the same time, however, both Christ and his apostles, by precept and example, taught that it was just, that those who neglected all their worldly affairs, in order that they might be at leisure to administer to the salvation of others, should be honourably maintained by them in their turn. Yet the apostles, and particularly Paul, yielded up this right, labouring for a support with their own hands, rather than be a burthen to those who were not affluent, or be exposed to the calumnies of the malevolent. By these means were the doctrines of the gospel promulgated throughout the world ; from which, says Grotius, how much the manners of following times have departed, is as unnecessary to be mentioned, as it is painful to reflect upon.

The clause in this verse, in which Christ directs his disciples to raise the dead, is not found in a great many manuscripts ; whence it has been inferred that it is an interpolation. This opinion seems to be confirmed by its not being mentioned in the first verse of the chapter, among the other miracles which they were directed to perform ; nor does it appear that the apostles raised any person from the dead, before the death of Christ.

9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses :

When Christ prohibited his disciples from taking any reward for performing miraculous cures, he did not doubt that it would immediately occur to the minds of the apostles, 'Then we must not undertake this journey, unless we are furnished with all kinds of provision ; at least with money, with which it may be purchased. Christ, therefore, anticipating this thought, assures them that God, whose business they were engaged in, would take care to provide necessary things for them ; and, that they might have a more certain proof of this, he orders them to go forth without making any provision for their journey.

10. Nor scrip for your journey ; *a wallet, or bag, to carry things which might be wanted in travelling ;* neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves :

Those who thought themselves contented with the least provision for travelling, were accustomed to take a coat, besides that which they wore ; a pair of shoes or sandals, besides that which they had on, because they are soon worn out in travelling ; and to provide a staff, besides that which they carried in their hand, lest the other should be broken or lost : but Christ does not permit his disciples to make even this moderate provision for their journey ; as they would find, wherever they travelled, the things that were necessary for them.

For the workman is worthy of his meat.

Meat is here to be understood, in a more general sense, for food, clothing, and lodging. God will take care that you shall have all these things, from those very persons in teaching and in healing whom you shall employ your time : and that for the best reason : for what is more just than that those who sow spiritual things, should reap carnal things ?

11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy ; and there abide.

Wherever you go, inquire with whom, from his liberal turn of mind, or good character, it is proper for you to lodge : here continue till you leave that town or city, and give no occasion, by going from house to house, for a suspicion that you are not easily pleased with what is provided for you, or that you have exhausted the liberality of those by whom you are received, by your fondness for expensive entertainments.

12. And when ye come into an house, salute it.

That is, wish it peace ; for that was the form of salutation among the Jews, and continues to be still in eastern countries. Under the word *peace* they included not merely tranquillity, but all good things ; whatever used to be sought after and desired.

13. And, if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it ; "*your peace will come upon it ;*" but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you ; "*your peace will return unto you.*"

That is, the blessings which you wish for others will, if they are unworthy of them, descend upon your own heads.

14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

This ceremony does not seem to contain a denunciation of divine judgment, but means the same thing as if the apostles should say ; We came hither not for our own sake, but for the sake of your salvation ; but, since you will not hearken unto our admonitions, take your own things to yourselves ; we will have no further intercourse with you ; we will not desire so much as the smallest particle from you. This was done from a very opposite reason to that which induced Naaman to carry back with him two mule's loads of earth, from the land of Judæa—respect to the country where he had received a cure.

15. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for that city.

It has been debated whether Christ here refers to temporal judgments, or future punishment ; but the sense will be nearly the same, in whichever way we understand the passage : for if the meaning of it should be, that the judgments inflicted upon those cities of Judæa which rejected the gospel, would be greater than those which befel Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed by fire from heaven, it will follow hence, likewise, that the inhabitants will be liable to severer punishment in another world : since there will be the same reason for making a distinction between them in a future life, as in the present. It ought not to appear to us unjust, if severer punishment hangs over the heads of the despisers of the gospel, than over those who were polluted with the foulest lusts, and with all kinds of vices : for crimes are not to be estimated exactly from their own tendency, but from the circumstances, likewise, of the persons who commit them. The inhabitants of Sodom enjoyed the benefits of natural notions of propriety of conduct, and the traditions of their parents : the Jews, of the law of Moses, which was much clearer. The men of Sodom had Lot as a preacher ; but the others, the apostles, bringing along with them great promises, and rendered respectable and conspicuous by many great miracles.

REFLECTIONS.

LET us be thankful that the gospel of Christ, which was at first confined to the narrow limits of Judæa, is now preached to all the world, and that there is no distinction made at present between Jew and Gentile. It is by the breaking down of this middle wall of partition that it has reached us in this distant corner of the globe ; on

a spot which, at that time, was scarcely heard of. How great has been the change, and how wonderful the means by which it has been accomplished! Twelve men, trained up to the ordinary occupations of life; without money in their purses; without any other clothes than what they wore; without knowledge, eloquence, or influence, do not seem likely instruments for converting the world; yet by these means was this great change accomplished. Irresistible must be the power of truth which has conquered all nations; admirable is the wisdom of divine Providence, in bringing about an event of such magnitude, by such simple instruments.

2. Let the ministers of religion learn to be contented with their situation, although it may be destitute of that outward splendour which many possess, and which is of so much value in the eyes of the world. The first preachers of the gospel had nothing of this kind to recommend them: they had no means of support but what the justice, the generosity, and gratitude of their hearers afforded them: they had nothing to rely upon, for the success of their undertaking, but the force of truth, and the excellence of their characters: with no other advantages than these, they obtained a comfortable subsistence, and spread their doctrine throughout the world. Had they affected the pomp of dress, or sought the aid of those distinctions which wealth confers, they might perhaps have gained more proselytes amongst the higher classes of society; but these would have been professors only in name, not in reality. They would have wanted that conviction of the truth, and that zealous attachment to it, which could alone render their conversion of any value. Let not ministers of religion in the present day aspire after greater honour and worldly emolument: it will lead men to suspect that they are of a mercenary disposition; that they are more desirous of procuring pleasure and profit to themselves, than of promoting the belief of truth, and the practice of duty; a suspicion which will greatly obstruct the success of their designs. Let them cheerfully submit to the want of the common accommodations of life, where it may be necessary to convince the world of the purity of the motives by which they are actuated, and to promote the cause of religion.

3. The maxim which Christ has laid down, for the direction of his apostles in dispensing their miraculous powers, affords an excellent rule for directing men in the liberal communication of the other bounties of Divine Providence. Those who have acquired knowledge, or arrived at wealth, or any other means of doing good, by much industry and labour, are by no means exempted from an obligation to impart them to others freely; but that obligation binds those most strongly, who have acquired these things without any cost or labour of their own; who are made rich or discerning by the hand of nature, or the generosity of their friends: for them to refuse to impart to others what they have attained so easily, or to do it grudgingly, and with reluctance, must be peculiarly inexcusable. They treat not others with the same liberality with which they have been treated themselves; they exercise not that benevolence towards their fellow-creatures, which God has exercised towards them; they discover a narrow, selfish spirit, wholly

unworthy of that honourable situation in which Providence has placed them.

Lastly ; Let those who, in the present day, reject the gospel of Christ without inquiry, and without examining its divine credentials, remember the danger to which they expose themselves. It is no small degree of guilt which they incur hereby ; it is no light evil with which they will be punished.

SECTION XXI.

Mission of the twelve Apostles continued.

MATTHEW x. 16—27.

16. BEHOLD, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves : be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Christ was now sending out his apostles upon a short journey, to preach the gospel in Judæa ; he therefore gives them instructions what they were to do, and how they were to behave. This he had already done in the preceding verses of this chapter : in those which follow, he warns them of the dangers which they were to encounter in the execution of their office . and endeavours to animate them to bear these evils with fortitude. The opposition of which he here speaks, did not take place during their present short journey, but made its appearance after Christ's death. These addresses and warnings, therefore, were most probably delivered a short time before that event ; according to the manner in which they are noticed in the other evangelists ; and not before the first mission of the apostles, as they are here recorded by Matthew.

Sheep in the midst of wolves, are weak and helpless creatures, in the power of cruel and ferocious animals. Such would be the condition of Christ's disciples, in venturing to preach the gospel amongst obstinate Jews and heathens. In this situation he exhorts them not to abandon all regard to their own security, but to take every prudent method to preserve their lives, and save themselves from injury ; after the example of the serpent, which is distinguished for its quickness in discerning danger from the foot of man, and for its speed in fleeing from it. There were other properties of the serpent, however, which he wished them not to imitate : he would have them keep at a distance from all fraud, treachery, and malignity, qualities which are supposed to reside in this creature, and which some men may dignify with the name of wisdom. The prudence in avoiding danger, which he recommended, must be accompanied with simplicity and innocence in the use of the means which were employed for this purpose.

17. But beware of men : for they will deliver you

up to the councils ; and they will scourge you in their synagogues.

Those of whom I warn you to beware, are not wild beasts, the wolf or the tiger ; but creatures more savage than they ; your fellow-men and countrymen, whose happiness you are studying to promote : for this act of benevolence you will be dragged before the public tribunal, and arraigned and punished as the greatest malefactors. By councils is here meant the sanhedrim, the highest court of justice amongst the Jews on ordinary occasions ; and by synagogues, not the buildings erected for public worship ; for these were not employed in administering justice ; but convocations assembled on extraordinary occasions, consisting of the sanhedrim, and other principal persons among the Jews. Before such an extraordinary assembly, it appears, Acts v. 40, that the apostles were beaten with rods.

18. And ye will be brought before governors and kings, for my sake ; for a testimony against them, "*for a testimony to them,*" and the Gentiles.

The truth of this prophecy appeared, when Peter pleaded his cause before Nero, John before Domitian, and others before the kings of the Parthians, Scythians, and Indians. Innumerable instances occur of the apostles being brought before the governors of provinces. It might well alarm illiterate men, who had been educated in a mean condition of life, to be told that they were to be brought before those who were deemed so much their superiors, and were possessed of so much power to hurt them ; but it would lessen their aversion to this disagreeable service, when they were informed that it would be the means of bringing those acquainted with the gospel who would not otherwise hear of it ; and prove the cause of their conversion or condemnation.

19. But, when they deliver you up, take no thought, "*be not anxious,*" how or what ye shall speak : for it shall be given you, in that same hour, "*moment,*" what ye shall speak.

The words of Christ in the original, do not prohibit all kinds of previous thought or meditation, but all anxious and laborious preparation, such as that of orators used to be. Mark says, " Think not before hand ;" and Luke, " Do not premeditate." In these words there seems to be an allusion to Exod. iv. 12, where God, to encourage Moses to go to Pharaoh, tells him : " Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." In the same manner Christ assures his apostles, that if any thing should be wanting to them, to fit them to speak before kings and governors, it should be supplied, by divine help, at the very time ; the spirit of God furnishing their minds with wisdom, and their mouths with eloquence : not that eloquence, indeed, which was affected and pompous ; but such as, by its simplicity and gravity, should carry with it the very form of truth. We see the fulfilment of this promise in the cases of Peter and Stephen, and of many

other confessors. All that Christ requires of his disciples is, that they should give their testimony to his doctrine ; God would enable them to do it properly.

20. For it is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

It is necessary we should be reminded that this declaration is not to be interpreted absolutely, but comparatively. We are not to suppose that Christ meant to say, that every word they should speak, upon these trying occasions, would be dictated to them by the spirit of God ; for that would be unnecessary, and does not correspond with what we find to be fact ; but he assures them that they would receive very great assistance : it is not so much you who will speak, as the spirit of God by you. Such a promise as this was well calculated to prevent them from being filled with consternation at the prospect of such great dangers : for what could give them greater courage than the assurance that the spirit, or which is the same thing, the power, of God, would enable them to speak ?

21. And the brother shall, “ *will*,” deliver up the brother to death ; and the father, the child ; and the children will rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

Unbelievers among the Jews and Gentiles shall be bitter enemies of Christians, although their nearest relations ; and, from a principle of enmity or fear, grounded on their connexion with such obnoxious persons, become informers against them, so as to be the cause of their being put to death.

22. And ye shall be hated of all men, for my name’s sake :

That is, Ye shall be hated by the majority of mankind, who, in common language, are called all men. To be hated for the name of Christ, is to be so treated because they profess themselves the disciples of Christ : for it was usual for disciples to be called after the name of their master. The apostle Peter explains to us the meaning of this phrase, when he says, 1 Pet. iv. 16, “ yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” Luke also says of the apostles Peter and John, that they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

But he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

These last words are usually referred to final salvation, which is supposed to be here promised to those who continue in the profession of the Christian faith to the end of life, through all the persecutions to which they may be exposed. But, as the same words are applied in another part of the evangelist Matthew, to the end of the Jewish state by the destruction of Jerusalem, (see Matt. xxiv. 13,) they may easily admit of the same construction here ; and Christ will then refer to a well-known fact, which took place

when Jerusalem was destroyed. The Christians, being warned of their danger by immediate revelation from heaven, or the preceding prophecies of Christ relating to that event, departed from the city, and were hereby preserved. It is as if he had said : He that continueth constant in the Christian faith, to the end of the Jewish state, shall escape all further persecution from that people : their power being then at an end, and they themselves dispersed through all nations.

23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another :

If ye are driven, by force or ill usage, from one city, expose not your lives to unnecessary danger, by returning thither again, and casting your pearls before swine ; nor yet desist from the execution of the office imposed upon you, by retiring to some solitary place where you will be safe from danger : but depart immediately to another city, where you may again attempt to make proselytes to my doctrines by preaching the gospel.

As a motive against all unnecessary delay in this important work, he adds,

For verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over, *or, as it is in the margin of the bible, " ye shall not end," or, " finish,"* the cities of Israel, till the son of man be come.

The inhabitants of the cities of Israel shall not be initiated into the Christian religion, or be converted to it, before the son of man come to take vengeance upon them. The coming of Christ, in these books of Scripture, is to be understood in various ways ; and to be referred often, not to his bodily presence, but to the proofs of his power or divine authority ; among which the descent of the Holy Spirit holds the most conspicuous place. This afforded the most certain proof that his kingdom, which had been long expected, was now come ; and that Christ was constituted king, with the fullest power from the Father. The ground of this opinion appears in the language of the evangelist John, who relates that Christ comforts his disciples against all the violence of impending danger, by telling them that he was about to send to them the Spirit of truth ; and immediately adds, " I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you ;" John xiv. 18, where, by the coming of Christ, is evidently signified the descent of the Spirit. By the coming of Christ, in other places, we are to understand the destruction of Jerusalem, and the total overthrow of the Jewish state ; because by that event the truth of his prophecy and the certainty of his divine mission were completely established. In this sense that phrase must be taken in this verse ; as if Christ had said ; If you are persecuted, think not *that* a sufficient reason for being silent and inactive for a season ; the most zealous and speedy endeavours to instruct the people are necessary, as the time for doing it is short, and will soon be past. You will not be able, by your most strenuous endeavours, to convert the inhabi-

tants of the cities of Israel to the Christian faith, before the son of man shall come in his glory, to punish the opposers of his reign.

24. The disciple is not above his master ; nor the servant above his lord.

25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master ; and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household ?

That the disciple is not above his master is a proverbial expression, employed by our Lord for different purposes ; being sometimes used to teach his disciples humility, and at other times, to teach them patience under reviling language and ill usage. It is for this purpose that he uses it in the passage before us. The Jews, when they saw how Christ cured dæmoniacks, had maliciously declared that he was a confederate with Beelzebub, the prince of the possessing dæmons ; and, as all possessing dæmons were supposed to be the spirits of wicked men, this insinuation was a severe reflection upon his character, as if he had formed a connection with wicked beings for some malevolent purposes. If the excellent character of the Saviour could not escape such a vile imputation, his disciples had no reason to be offended at any bad name or abusive language that might be applied to them ; but every reason to apprehend the same, or worse, treatment. Accordingly, we find that Celsus calls the apostles, *magicians* ; and Ulpian, a celebrated Roman lawyer, calls them *impostors* ; Tacitus, *men who were convicted of hating the human race* ; Christians and atheists were considered as synonymous terms, or words of the same import, amongst the heathens.*

26. Fear them not therefore : for there is nothing covered which shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known.

The sense of this verse is that the disciples ought not to dissemble the truth which had been entrusted to them, whatever opposition they might find in their ministry, because it is the design of God that the doctrine of the gospel, which Jesus Christ then taught them in secret, should be published in every land.

27. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light ; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops.

In darkness means in private, and in the light, in public. The roofs of houses in Judæa and in other eastern countries, were flat, and used for walking upon, in the cool of the evening or morning. Christ makes known to his disciples that his intention is that they should prepare themselves to announce to all the world, openly and courageously, that which he had not then time to publish in every place, or whatever he had taught them in private.

* Grotius' note on this passage.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the conduct of Christ, in warning his disciples of their approaching dangers and trials, we see an instance of his wisdom and compassion : he does not scruple to tell them that they would be brought before the public tribunals, before kings and governors, on account of their religious profession ; that they would be accused of capital crimes ; that their nearest relations would be the most active in procuring their condemnation ; that they would be regarded as the greatest enemies of mankind, and assailed by them with all the ferocity of wolves. Such language, addressed to young converts not yet firmly established in their new principles, may appear to some imprudent and discouraging ; they may suppose it calculated to fill their minds with unnecessary terrors about future and distant evils : but Christ did not wish to conceal from his disciples their real situation : he would not flatter them with hopes of worldly prosperity and ease, for which there was no foundation, lest their attachment to his cause should appear to be the effect not of conviction of the truth of the gospel, but of ambition : he thought that the best way to prepare them for danger was to inform them of it ; that they might fortify their minds with such considerations as would enable them to encounter it. This information would indeed destroy those pleasing dreams of worldly grandeur which the disciples were so ready to entertain, and give them no small degree of present uneasiness ; but it would save them from the more distressing pain that must necessarily arise from afflictions and dangers which they had never been taught to expect. It was not an officious zeal to display miraculous powers, in laying before them future events ; but an act of enlightened benevolence, performed with a view to save them from much trouble and disgrace, and which deserved their best thanks.

2. From the language of Christ upon this occasion, we may learn how we ought to behave in seasons of persecution. He allows, rather than commands us, to flee from it ; for he knew that men's fears would lead them to adopt this measure, without any express injunction : but if he permits us to leave one place, it is only to expose ourselves to fresh dangers by pursuing the same conduct in another. Here is no intimation that his disciples are to arm themselves against their persecutors, or to resist violence by force ; prudence and flight are their only weapons of defence ; if these fail to afford them security, he has not authorized them to have recourse to any other.

But even these are to be used with caution ; prudence is apt to degenerate into artifice and cowardice ; and men may imagine that they ought to avoid all danger, because Christ allows them to run from that which is extreme : but he lets his disciples know, that the prudence which he allowed was not consistent with the concealment of the truth, and was utterly removed from all fraud. The innocence of the dove must be joined with the wisdom of the serpent : the truth, however offensive, must be proclaimed in the most open and public manner — from the house-tops.

3. The persecutions to which the first preachers of the gospel were exposed, afford us a striking proof of the folly or depravity of mankind. They behaved like enemies to those who were their best friends ; who endeavoured to confer upon them the greatest benefit, by giving them wise and good laws for the regulation of their conduct ; by bringing the glad tidings of the pardon of sin, and a resurrection to eternal life : they opposed those who were accompanied with evident seals of a mission from heaven ; and they were thus found fighting against God, as well as against themselves. What stronger proof could they give of their perverseness or want of discernment ! Other men who have professed obnoxious truth, could not boast of a commission from heaven ; nor pretend that the doctrines which they taught were of equal importance with the fundamental principles of the Christian revelation ; yet to persecute them is to punish them for being honest and upright ; for endeavouring to do good at the hazard of their property or their lives. Is this just and wise ?

4. The sufferings which others have endured, in propagating the truth, ought to reconcile our minds to those evils to which we may be exposed in the same cause. If the master of the house, the innocent and holy Jesus, has been accused of malicious intentions, and charged with being a confederate with wicked spirits ; if the apostles, who were employed in publishing the most important message which was ever conveyed to men, were hated of all men on this account ; let not inferior servants in the household complain, if they meet with like treatment, in spreading what they deem to be important truth ; if they are denominated by hard names, or incur universal odium. It is an honourable testimony to their integrity and zeal ; it ranks them with Christ and his apostles, the most eminent servants of God, and the greatest benefactors of the human race. Let them rejoice that they are accounted worthy to suffer shame in such company.

SECTION XXII.

Mission of the twelve Apostles concluded.

MATTHEW x. 28—42.

28. AND fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul ; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Men will not scruple to inflict upon you the greatest evils in their power, for the profession of my religion, not excepting death itself ; but do not fear what they are able to do unto you. The life which they are able to take away is only that of the body ; the soul is beyond the reach of their malice ; whereas, by denying the

Christian faith, in order to save your lives, you will expose yourselves to the displeasure of the Almighty Being, who can punish the soul as well as the body in hell. The word which we here render, to destroy, signifies also, to punish; so that we cannot infer from this passage, as some have done, that wicked men will be annihilated; but it has been observed that Christ speaks of the soul and body being in hell together; as if he had no idea that the one could exist without the other.

29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? *the tenth part of a Roman denarius; about three farthings of our money;* And one of them, "*even one of them,*" will not fall on the ground without your Father.

That is, One of them will not perish or die, unless he orders or permits it. Christ here teaches us than the providence of God extends to all living creatures, not excepting the meanest individuals of them. Epicurus denied a Providence, entirely: Aristotle, although he allowed a Providence, confined it to the heavens: some Arabians have thought that it employed itself about things in general, but not about particular events and individual beings. Some of the Hebrews thought that Providence was employed about men, but not about beasts; but this passage declares that the Providence of God is universal; that he has under his inspection and care all living things; and that nothing can happen to any of them without his permission. This doctrine was of particular importance to the disciples of Christ at this time, when they were about to be exposed to great evils: it would afford them great consolation to know, that, since the knowledge and power of God are infinite, and it appears that he has on many occasions altered the course of nature, whatever was permitted to befall them, was permitted with a certain and wise design; God being able to prevent it, if he thought proper.

30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

This is a proverbial expression, signifying that their smallest concerns are regarded by God: a hair being used, both by the Greeks and Latins, for the smallest thing. What men reckon valuable they are accustomed to count; but things which are of no estimation they will not take the trouble to number. There is another Hebrew phrase which bears some resemblance to this, and may help to illustrate it. When they mean to express that the smallest evil shall not befall a man, they say, a hair of him shall not perish. It seems as if an emphasis was intended to be laid upon the word *your* in this passage — your head, who are not only men, but the messengers of divine truth, and whom God therefore takes under his special protection. Since, therefore, you are his particular care, be assured, that however, men may rage against you, no loss shall happen to you, except what will be for your benefit, and that of others.

31. Fear ye not, therefore ; ye are of more value than many sparrows.

If God takes care of beasts and fowls, for the services which they are able to render to man, he will much more take care of you, who can be so useful in promoting his own designs ; your lives are too valuable to be unnecessarily exposed to danger.

32. Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

To confess Christ before men, is not only to acknowledge that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, but likewise publicly to profess his doctrines, to whatever evils and dangers that profession may expose us. This Christ requires from us : it is not sufficient to believe with the heart ; it is also necessary to confess with the mouth. He has given us no reason to complain that he has imposed upon us a hard commandment, if we consider the reward with which obedience to it will be accompanied ; that of being owned by Christ, as his faithful disciples, before God and men. To those who shall refuse to confess Christ in this manner, he has threatened that he will publicly deny them. As the preceding promise, however, includes a secret condition of perseverance, so, this threatening is to be understood as having in itself, likewise, a tacit condition, which leaves room for repentance. If, after having denied Christ, men repent of their fault, and alter their conduct, they will avert the threatened evil. It was in this manner that Peter was saved.

34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth : I came not to send peace, but a sword.

Though all my precepts and exhortations tend to enforce goodwill among men, and to establish among them the most firm and lasting peace, expect not that this will be the effect : for, through the ignorance or wickedness of mankind, it will prove the occasion of much animosity and variance. By the word *sword*, here used, we are not to understand war, but division ; for it was the office of the sword to divide and separate, as well as to kill. Accordingly, in the parallel passage in Luke, it is, “ suppose ye that I am come to send peace on earth ? I tell you nay ; but rather division.” It is obvious to remark that by sending a sword we are not to understand the design of Christ, all whose counsels and wishes tend to peace and concord, but rather the event : unless we suppose that he speaks in reference to a foreknowledge of the event, and a firm design to propagate the truth, notwithstanding.

35. For I am come to set a man at variance against

his father ; and the daughter against her mother ; and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

36. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

Christ here shows that times were coming, not less dangerous than those which Micah deplores, vii. 6, and therefore repeats that prophet's words. His doctrine, he foretels, will produce division and animosity among the nearest relations and most intimate friends ; and he warns his disciples of it, lest they should be surprised or offended at the event.

37. He that loveth father or mother, more than me, is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me.

That is, He whose attachment to his nearest relatives is stronger than his attachment to the truth, is unfit to be my disciple, and will find it impossible to be so : for he will perceive that he cannot be faithful to me, and, at the same time, preserve their affection. Christ here speaks of attachment to his doctrine, and not to his person. He had recommended to his disciples the love of peace, and pronounced those blessed who endeavour to preserve or promote it ; but he here cautions them against suffering their love of peace to overcome their love of truth. So, the apostle Paul, commanding us to cultivate peace with all men, adds this proviso, "as much as in you lies;" for truth ought to be dearer to us than peace, even with our nearest relatives.

38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

There is a reference here to the custom of making the person who was to be crucified, carry his cross to the place of execution. Crucifixion was the most cruel and infamous of the punishments inflicted by the Romans : hence the cross came to be used, metaphorically, for all kinds of evils : to bear or take up the cross, therefore, and follow Christ, is to expose ourselves with fortitude to the greatest evils in his cause. The expressions of Christ are general, and may be applied to any great sufferings : yet it is not unlikely that he had a particular reference, in what he said, to crucifixion : signifying that they were not to decline that cruel and ignominious punishment, in the profession of the truth. Peter and some others of the apostles and martyrs were called to this severe trial, after it had been consecrated by the death of their master.

39. He that findeth his life shall lose it ; and he that loseth his life, for my sake, shall find it.

These words may be considered as a military proverb ; since it is found by experience that cowardly soldiers expose themselves to that danger and ruin which they seek to avoid by a shameful flight ; but that the brave, by acting boldly, and encountering danger with intrepidity, make the best provision for their own

safety. The same thing may be said of the disciples of Christ, whether we regard this life or that which is to succeed it. Those who courageously persevered in the profession of Christianity, often escaped from the greatest dangers, contrary to all expectation; as Peter did from prison, and Paul from shipwreck; and, in the time of the Jewish war, the disciples, being divinely admonished, retreated in season to Pella, and hereby withdrew themselves from danger. On the other hand, Judas, who, that he might enjoy the good things of this life, apostatized from Christ, hastened his own death; and those who returned to the Jews were involved in the common calamities of the nation. If we regard another life, which Christ had always and principally in view, as the only true life, the justness of his words will appear much more clearly. He who apostatizes from Christ, shall not find, or shall not long keep, this short life, which he studies by that means to preserve, and will certainly incur the loss of the next: but on the contrary, he who is constant, will expose his present life to danger, but will not immediately lose it; or, if he do, will receive it again with increase from the hand of God.

40. He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.

Christ now proceeds to comfort his disciples, by showing them that, among so many enemies, they would not want consolations from pious and good men, whom God would stir up for this purpose by proposing them to great rewards. He first tells them, that to receive them, would be considered as an act of duty equally meritorious with receiving himself; and, that this was the same thing as receiving God himself, whose messenger he was, and whose words he brought: for such service no small reward would be bestowed.

41. He that receiveth a prophet, "*a teacher*," in the name of a teacher, shall receive a teacher's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward.

He who receives a teacher, in that character, and out of regard to his office, shall receive the reward of a teacher, that is, a large reward, such as used to be conferred upon those who were engaged in so difficult and honourable an employment; and he that receives a righteous man, a genuine disciple of Christ, who, although no teacher of religion, recommends it by his example, shall receive the reward of those who bear that excellent character. Lot and Abraham entertained angels, without knowing them to be angels; but the widow of Zarephath received Elijah in the character of a prophet; and Laban received Jacob as a righteous man; and they all received their rewards.

42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the

name of a disciple, *i. e. as a disciple*, verily I say unto you, he shall by no means lose his reward.

Christ calls his disciples little ones, because they were at this time young in knowledge ; agreeably to which idea, such persons are, in other places, called babes in Christ ; or because they wanted that knowledge and dignity which are deemed necessary to denominate men great. With little knowledge, however, they had much docility and love of the truth. The smallest act of kindness performed for such persons, would not pass unnoticed. From this passage we learn, that the value of our good actions depends upon the reference which we have, in performing them, to God, and to Jesus Christ.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WHAT a delightful view does Christ here give us of the divine government ! Its care extends to the smallest and meanest being alive, no less than to the most excellent : it suffers nothing to befall any individual, throughout the creation, which may counteract the wise and benevolent designs of God. How numerous must this great family of the Almighty be ! Who can count the millions of beings of which it is composed, when we take into our account the various animals which swarm in the air, the earth, and the sea ! Yet each of these is watched over, and provided for, with as much care as if there were no other being in the universe. What benevolence must dwell in that heart, from which flows so many streams of good ! How comprehensive is that mind, which can attend to so many things at once, without embarrassment ! Let us live contented and easy under his government : if any trouble or affliction befall us, we should remember that it is with his knowledge and permission ; it shall proceed no further, and continue no longer, than he allows. From evil in his hands, and under his direction, we have nothing to fear ; in discharging our duty to such a Being, we may cheerfully expose our lives to danger : for we may be assured that they cannot be destroyed without leave from him, and that, whatever we may suffer, we shall lose nothing in his service.

2. Let us observe how strongly Christ enforces upon his disciples, and, through them, upon us, the open profession of the truth : it is an important service, which we must not decline, although we hereby occasion great divisions in the world ; although we should alienate the affections of our best friends, disturb the peace of private families, and endanger our own lives. If, from the love of ease and quiet, we refuse to perform it, we are declared to be unworthy of Christ ; to be unfit to be his disciples ; he will deny any relation to us at the day of final judgment ; saying, Depart from me ye workers of iniquity ; I never knew you ; and for our cowardly endeavours to escape pain and reproach, in his service, he will condemn both body and soul to endure the torments of hell. Have you then discovered the will of Christ ? Are you

acquainted with the genuine doctrines of Christianity, which others have corrupted and defaced ? Remember your obligation to profess them openly, and to use your best endeavours to propagate them in the world : plead not as an excuse, that you shall offend your friends ; that you shall destroy the comfort of the most valuable connexions in life ; that you shall injure your worldly interests, or endanger your lives. All these things Christ plainly foresaw : but he did not think that they were sufficient to justify you in being silent and inactive. What you are called upon to perform, is not a service of choice or discretion, which you may execute or neglect, as you find convenient ; but it is a sacred and important duty, which you are to discharge in all circumstances. To confirm your resolution to expose yourself to all kinds of evil in professing and propagating the truth, consider not only the greater evils which you will incur, by attempting to flee from them ; but likewise the reward with which fortitude and courage will be attended. You will be acknowledged by Christ, before angels and men, as a disciple worthy of a crucified Master ; you will be rewarded, in company with your fellow-christians, with eternal life, and with the most honourable station which that life affords.

3. Let us remember, that the evils produced by preaching the gospel of Christ in the world, are very inconsiderable, when compared with the good which it has done. When we reflect upon the private dissensions and animosities, upon the public wars and dreadful incidents, to which religious differences and religious disputes have given occasion, some of us may be tempted to think that the Christian religion itself has been a calamity to the world ; that we ought ourselves to avoid all discussion of those religious topics, about which men entertain opposite opinions ; and, as far as possible, to prevent others from engaging in them. This, however, would be a hasty and rash conclusion. The evils occasioned to society and individuals by erroneous systems of faith, are infinitely greater than the temporary mischief arising from attempts to remove them. Providence has left us no other way of spreading just sentiments of religion in the world, than by discussion ; which may inflame some minds to anger and violence ; but if the truth is to be abandoned in order to avoid these evils, we ought, upon the same principle, to quarrel with all the comforts of life, which all produce a greater or less degree of mischief. How many evils arise from the grand instrument of domestic convenience, fire : yet, shall we use no fire, because it may sometimes burn our houses or our persons ? How many evils have been brought upon the world by contests for national liberty and independence : but are these blessings to be resigned, because much blood must be shed to obtain or preserve them ?

4. We may observe how acceptable to God, are acts of kindness done to his disciples when in a state of persecution. The kindness which is shown to them, is shown to Christ and to God : the more we do for them, the greater and more honourable will be our reward ; nor will the smallest instance of benevolence pass unnoticed.

SECTION XXIII.

John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to Jesus.

MATTHEW xi. 1—15.

1. AND it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence, to teach and to preach in their cities, *i. e. in the cities of the Jews.*

2. Now, when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ;

3. And said unto him, Art thou he that should come ; “*that is to come;*” or do we look for another ? “*or are we to look for another ?*”

We read, in Matt. iv. 12, that as soon as Jesus heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee, and began his public ministry. From that time to the present, John had lain in prison. The reason of his confinement is told in another place, where we learn that Herod having been guilty of incest and adultery, in taking his brother Philip’s wife, John, with a boldness and courage which distinguished the former prophets, who frequently reprov’d kings for their faults, ventured to tell him that it was not lawful for him to have her. This instance of integrity could not be borne by Herodias, against whose licentiousness and advancement it was directed ; and at her instigation, he was thrown into prison ; but no further violence was offered to his person, either from a fear of the people, who accounted him a prophet, or out of respect to his character. From the one or the other of these motives, likewise, his confinement was not very rigorous : for it appears, from this account, that his disciples had free access to him in prison, and that he sent by them messages to whom he pleased. While he was in this situation, he had repeated accounts brought to him of the miracles which Jesus performed : these, at length, appeared so numerous and so extraordinary, and followed one another in such quick succession, that he began to entertain a strong suspicion that he was the promised Messiah ; a notion, which he was prevented from embracing before, by the mean appearance of the Saviour, and the total want of that worldly grandeur so commonly expected by the Jews. As there still, however, remained some doubts in his mind upon this subject, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him the plain question, Whether he were the great prophet or deliverer whom they expected under the character of the Messiah ; or whether he was only his forerunner, and was to be followed by that great personage ?

This seems to be the natural and obvious meaning of the account which is here given us of the conduct of John : but how

came John, who is universally acknowledged to be the forerunner of Jesus, not to know him to be the Messiah, or to entertain any doubt upon that subject? Did he not see the Spirit descending upon him at his baptism, and hear a voice from heaven, declaring, "this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased?" Was he not informed that the person who should be honoured with these distinguished testimonies, should baptize with the Holy Ghost? In answer to these questions, and many others of a similar nature, which might be suggested, I shall only reply, that nothing more seems to be conveyed to John by these miraculous appearances, than an intimation that Jesus was a very extraordinary personage; that he was to work miracles, and be his successor. Whether he were the Messiah or not, he was to learn, like other persons, from the miracles which he performed, and from the correspondence of his character with the prophecies which predicted his appearance. Had John been clearly informed, by divine inspiration, that Jesus was the promised Messiah, it would have been impossible for so good a man to have entertained any doubts upon the subject afterwards; which, however, we find that he did entertain, and sent to Jesus to have them removed. For, can we suppose that he would receive greater satisfaction from the testimony of Jesus, in regard to his own character, than from that of God himself?

There are other circumstances which render it highly improbable, that John the Baptist knew Jesus to be the Messiah, and had announced him in that character to the Jews; for John still continued to have disciples of his own; which would not have been the case if he had pointed out to them the Messiah. If he had not urged it upon them himself, their own feelings would have induced them to forsake him, in order to follow so distinguished a personage.

Had Jesus been publicly announced to be the Messiah, by one, whom all regarded as a prophet, the people would immediately have received him in that character, in consequence of his testimony. They would have assembled together to make him a king, and Herod must soon have been alarmed at their proceedings: for he would have apprehended nothing less than the loss of his own power. John would have been cast into prison, not for telling him that it was unlawful for him to have his brother's wife, but for supporting a claimant to the throne, in the place of the present possessor, and would have been confined there with the utmost rigour; none of his disciples being allowed to visit him. But as we find none of these things mentioned in the history, we may safely conclude that no such declaration was made by John the Baptist, and that his office was confined to calling the people to repentance, and to proclaiming Jesus Christ to be his superior and successor.

I have dwelt the longer upon this subject, because the interpretation which I have given differs from that which is generally received, and appears necessary to relieve the gospel history from several difficulties with which it will otherwise be embarrassed.

4. Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and show John again those things which ye do hear and see.

5. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear: the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

These miracles contain the precise character given by the prophet Isaiah of the times of the Messiah, xxxv. 5, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." lxi. 1, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek;" so we translate this passage in Isaiah; but the Greek translation of the Old Testament has, as Matthew has given it, "to preach the gospel to the poor." Our Lord refers to this prophecy as characteristic of himself; his own method of teaching differing much from that of the doctors of that age: for the lawyers taught scarcely any man, unless at a great price, and held the common people in great contempt, calling them worldly people. Formerly prophets were sent to kings and to great men; but Christ showed himself first to fishermen.

There is a circumstance mentioned by Luke, vii. 21, which throws some light upon this narrative: for he tells us that in the same hour, when the disciples of John were present with him, he took occasion to cure many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and that to many who were blind he gave sight. It has been generally supposed that John sent his disciples to Jesus for their satisfaction, and not his own; that they might be convinced that he was the Messiah, by seeing his miracles and hearing his discourses themselves: but this supposition does not at all agree with the account here given of the message of John; or of the answer of Jesus, which is directed to him, and not to them; "go and tell *John* what ye have seen and heard." We may observe, likewise, that Jesus does not make a direct answer to the Baptist's question, by telling him that he was the Messiah, but refers him to his miraculous works, as the proper evidence of this truth; acting, on this occasion towards John as he had acted towards his own disciples: for he did not directly inform them that he was the Christ, but left them to infer it from his discourses and miracles; and, when he found that they knew it, he enjoined them to keep it secret. But how superfluous would this reserve be, if John had publicly proclaimed him to be the Messiah.

6. And happy is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

The humble circumstances and mean appearance of Christ, led John to conclude at first, that he could not be the Messiah: till the miracles which he wrought began to dispel his prejudices. Christ, therefore, takes occasion hence to pronounce those happy

who can surrender to the force of evidence their long-cherished prejudices, and are willing to receive a Saviour who produces proper credentials of a divine mission, although destitute of all that external splendour which men are ready to expect, and placed in mean and afflicted circumstances.

7. And, as they departed, "*at their departure,*" Jesus began to say to the multitudes, concerning John ; What went ye out into the wilderness to see ? A reed shaken with the wind ?

The meaning is, You had I suppose, some cause for which you ran, with so much eagerness, into those desert places ; for it is not credible that you assembled there that you might see reeds shaken with the winds : yet, besides John, there was scarcely any thing but reeds to behold in those places.

8. But what went ye out for to see ? A man clothed in soft raiment ? "*in delicate apparel ?*" Behold, they that wear delicate apparel are in kings' houses.

John's dress was the very reverse of delicate apparel : for he wore a garment of camel's hair, fastened round him with a leathern girdle. It could not, therefore, be the object of your assembling there to see delicate apparel, which is only to be found in palaces.

9. But what went ye out for to see ? A prophet ? "*a teacher ?*" Yea, I say unto you, and more than a teacher.

10. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

This language, which is taken from the prophet Malachi, iii. 1, 2, is an allusion to the custom of kings, who send people before them to prepare the way by which they are to pass. John prepared the way for Christ, by calling upon men to repent ; by declaring that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and by pointing out Jesus to them as far superior to himself, and as qualified to give them full information upon this subject.

11. Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, *i. e. among the children of men*, there hath not risen, "*been raised up,*" a greater than John the Baptist.

What rendered John superior in dignity to all the other prophets, was his being employed to announce the approach of the kingdom of the Messiah ; an event of infinitely greater consequence than any thing which the ancient prophets had foretold. In regard to supernatural gifts, he was far inferior to his predecessors : for he wrought no miracles.

Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he.

The least in the kingdom of heaven, is the least in preaching the heavenly kingdom: the whole comparison is in regard to the gift of prophecy. As much as John exceeded all the other prophets, by so much did the prophets of the New Testament, even the meanest of them, exceed John, on account of the extent of their knowledge in regard to the deliverance of the human race. That, before the coming of John, was a mystery: it began to receive light in his time; and after the sufferings of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, it shone more clearly than the meridian light, in the discourses of the apostles.

12. And from the days of John the Baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force; *better as it is in the margin, "the kingdom of heaven is gotten by force, and they that thrust men take it by force."*

By this language, Christ meant to express the zeal, haste, or greediness, with which men pressed into the kingdom of heaven. He mentions this in the presence of John's disciples, that they might convey to their master the agreeable news that the kingdom of heaven, which he had announced, was begun, and was enlarging itself with greater rapidity.

13. For all the prophets, and the law, prophesied, "*were your teachers,*" until John.

The meaning is, the law and prophets have been your masters, till the time that John appeared. Now Providence is about to give you another master in my person, of whose approach John was sent to give notice.

14. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was to come.

The appearance of Elias, or Elijah, before the coming of Christ, had been foretold by Malachi; (iv. 5;) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." This prophecy, some of the Jews understood of the appearance of Elijah in person, a second time, in the world: others supposed, with much better reason, that it referred to a prophet who should appear with the spirit and power of Elias, who was deterred by no dangers, in the most corrupt times, from placing before the king and before the people their sins. A prophet with the same zeal and fortitude, was to appear before the coming of Christ. Hence the Jews, when they wished to know who John was, asked him, Art thou Elias? i. e. he in person: when he said, I am not, they again asked, Art thou that prophet? the prophet foretold under that character; to which he answered, No. It is remarkable that in that passage, John denies himself to be the very person whom Christ, in this, says he is. To reconcile these two passages, it has been generally supposed that when John said he

was not Elias, he only meant to deny that he was Elias in person, and that he still believed himself to be the figurative Elias : but this will not account for his saying that he was not that prophet who, by his character, represented Elias. I see no other way of reconciling the language of John with that of Christ, than by supposing that he was mistaken in telling the Jews that he was not Elias. This agrees very well with the account given of him in this chapter, where he is represented as not knowing, or at least doubting, whether Jesus was the Christ. For if he was ignorant of the character of Christ, or doubtful about it, he must be unacquainted with his own, or could not know that he was Elias : for if Jesus was not the Christ, *he* could not be the prophet that was immediately to precede him, but there must be another who was to sustain that character. On the other hand, had he been sure that he was Elias, he could have had no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah.

15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

In such words, Christ calls the attention of his audience to any important sentiments which he has to deliver : that John was the Elias foretold by Malachi, was of this kind : for it might be inferred thence that Jesus was the Messiah.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the conduct of John the Baptist we may learn how those ought to act who entertain doubts about any important religious truth. He was not willing to remain uncertain whether Jesus was the Messiah, but endeavoured to obtain satisfaction by applying to the best source of information. In the same manner let us act, in the like circumstances. If there be any truth upon the reception or rejection of which important consequences appear to depend, but attended with some degree of obscurity and difficulty, and about which the world is divided, think it not sufficient to say, “ the subject is difficult ; great and wise men differ in their opinion ; it is not likely that I shall ever be able to settle my judgment ; I will sit down contented with my present uncertainty, and if I hereby remain without the knowledge of an important truth, I hope God will excuse my ignorance : ” This conduct would discover an indifference to the truth, unworthy of a being endowed with the powers of reason, and highly criminal. It is the duty of every man to employ the rational faculty which God has given him, in searching and inquiring for religious truth ; and in proportion to the importance of the subject, should be our application and industry ; nor is it possible to say whether a clear knowledge of it can be attained, or not, until we have made a fair trial. If we give up the pursuit, before this has been done, we are chargeable with all the evils which may arise from our ignorance. Let it be our maxim, that it is better to get wisdom than gold, and understanding than silver : but he that refuseth instruction, or will not seek after it, despiseth his own soul. Blessed is the man who is not offended with the truth ; who has resolution to embrace it

under the most disgusting form, and can sacrifice to his love of it, his interest, his inclinations, and his prejudices.

2. We may learn from this account, what is the proper and most convincing evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus. When he is asked whether he be the Christ, he does not wish the person who proposed the question, to take his own assertion for the fact, but refers him to the proof of his claim to that character : and in this he makes his appeal not to the reasonableness and excellence of his doctrine ; nor to the virtues of his character, which, however, deserved great stress ; but to the miracles which he wrought. These were so numerous and extraordinary, so far surpassing, in these respects, the miracles of those prophets who went before him, that they were a proof both of his divine mission, and of his being the promised Messiah. To this standard let us make our appeal, for our own satisfaction and the conviction of others. If no one can change the course of nature without the assistance of him who established it, and if that assistance can never be given to one who endeavours to propagate false and dangerous doctrines, then may we conclude that whatever Christ teaches us is the truth. This evidence affords us a solid rock for our faith, which nothing can shake.

3. We see that it was pointed out as the characteristic of the times of the Messiah, that the poor should have the gospel preached unto them. When this took place in the times of Jesus Christ, it was a proof that he was the Messiah, as his character corresponded with prophecy. It is, besides, so agreeable to the conduct of Providence in other instances, that it may, independently of any connexion with the prophecy, be regarded as an evidence of the divine origin of the Christian religion : for the most valuable blessings of Providence are distributed with an impartial hand : the sun shines upon all, and men enjoy the blessings of health and mental capacity, without any regard to their condition in life. If, therefore, so important a favour as a revelation from heaven, is communicated to the world, we have reason to expect that it will be bestowed with the like impartiality. A gospel addressed and accommodated only to the rich, could not surely come from the Father of all mankind. The wisdom, as well as the benevolence of the Divine Being, shines in such a disposition of things : for the poor are more ready to receive new and unpopular doctrines than the rich. It was proper, therefore, that the Christian religion should be addressed to them, and it appears in fact that the first proselytes to Christianity were principally from that class of people. Let us learn to imitate the wisdom and goodness of Providence, in the attention which it has paid to the poor, by taking more pains to instruct them in the principles of religion. Here is a wide field for our talents and exertions, greatly neglected at present, but which, if properly cultivated, would abundantly reward our labours. The little attention which is paid to the religious instruction of the poor, is a melancholy proof how deficient we are in the benevolent spirit of Christianity.

SECTION XXIV.

Discourse concerning John continued. Calamities denounced on unbelieving cities.

MATTHEW xi. 16—30.

16. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, "*to their companions* :"

Christ does not mean to compare the unbelieving Jews to children who call to their companions, but to those to whom they call, and whom they reproach as being pleased with nothing.

17. And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented; "*ye have not joined in the lamentation*."

In eastern countries it is usual to hire persons for the purpose of mourning for the dead, which they do with loud and united cries. On these occasions, when the signal is given by one person the rest of the company join in the lamentation. It is to this custom that allusion is made, when it is said, "we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented:" the meaning of the comparison is, that neither the severity of John the Baptist, and the austerity of his manners, nor the mildness of Christ, and the condescension with which he accommodated himself to the manners and the weaknesses of men were able to affect the Jews; but rather contributed to harden them. This reproach is to be applied principally to the Pharisees and doctors of the law, and not to the Jewish nation in general, who heard John with pleasure, and were baptized by him. The whole language is proverbial.

18. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a dæmon.

This may refer to the ordinary diet of John, who lived in an abstemious manner, and denied himself common food: for Luke says, that he came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine: it may also very well signify frequent fasts: for the disciples of John said to Jesus; "why do we fast often; but thine eat and drink?" which last words are used as equivalent to not fasting. From the frequent fasts or abstemious life of John, who spent his time in the wilderness, secluded from the cheerful society of men, the Pharisees took occasion to accuse him of being afflicted with melancholy madness; or, which meant the same thing, with having a dæmon: for they considered all madmen, whether melancholy or raving, as being possessed by a dæmon.

19. The son of man came eating and drinking, *living upon the food used by other men, and not practising fasting*; and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

By wisdom we are here to understand the wise counsel of God, calling the Jews to repentance, both by the severity of John and the mildness of Christ, that it might leave nothing untried, and that they might have no one to blame. The children of wisdom, are those who love and honour her; in the same manner as the sons of peace, are those who love and cultivate it, or the peaceable. Those who justify wisdom, are those who approve and applaud it. Thus the disciples of John and Christ approved of the method which God had taken for their instruction, and esteemed it to be right and just. Christ applies this observation, which was probably a familiar maxim of the Rabbies, to the objections which the Jews made to the character of John and Jesus, in order to show that neither of them had been entirely useless.

20. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.

21. Wo unto thee, "*Alas for thee*," Chorazin! Alas for thee, Bethsaida: for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sack-cloth and ashes.

These words are not an imprecation of vengeance upon these cities, but only a denunciation of the evils which they were about to bring upon themselves by their impenitence, as a warning to others, to avoid the same punishment. Tyre and Sidon were two maritime cities of Phœnicia, a country bordering upon Judæa, eminent for their commerce and wealth, and for that corruption which great prosperity usually introduces. This, at length, brought down upon them the vengeance of heaven, and they were entirely destroyed. Before that event, they had been solemnly admonished, by the prophet Ezekiel, (chap. xxvi, xxvii, xxviii,) of their sins, and their approaching fate; but without effect.—Christ now says, that if to the admonitions of Ezekiel, had been added so many and such great miracles as he had exhibited in these cities of Galilee, they would probably have done what [the Ninivites did formerly, when they repented of their sins with signs of the greatest grief, in dust and ashes: whence he infers the great guilt of Bethsaida and Chorazin, who, although admonished by such great signs, had not repented of their sins, nor received his doctrine. They were more hardened and irreclaimable than some of the most corrupt heathens. We are not to suppose that Christ here spoke with absolute certainty of what the event would have been, had his miracles been wrought in Tyre and Sidon: for

although we find that Jesus on many occasions discovered that he knew what was in the hearts of men, and though he might therefore be enabled to perceive what would take place, in case certain circumstances happened; yet, as those who now attended upon him did not attribute so much to him, it is more likely that he suited his discourse to their apprehensions, and spoke of what was very probable, in all human judgment, after carefully weighing things.

If it should be asked, why God withheld from the Tyrians and Sidonians such advantages as would have proved the means of their reformation; it may be answered, that there is no greater difficulty here, than in a thousand other instances, in which God gives to sinners sufficient evidence for their conviction and reformation, if they would attend to it with unprejudiced minds; but not all which might be bestowed. In this case, it is the duty of men to accept with gratitude what God bestows; and not prescribe to him what, or how, he should give.

22. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment than for you.

Some would here render "in a day of punishment," supposing that Christ referred not to the final judgment, but to the period when God would punish the Jews with temporal calamities for rejecting the Messiah. At that time it would appear that their sufferings were greater than those formerly endured by the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon. In whichever way we understand the words, it appears from them, that the guilt contracted by resisting the evidence of miracles is peculiarly great, and deserves extraordinary punishment.

23. And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell, "*to the grave*:" for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Thou, who art rich and flourishing by thy trade, shalt be entirely ruined and destroyed: which happened in the war between the Jews and Romans; so that there are no vestiges of it remaining; nor of Bethsaida and Chorazin. To be lifted up to heaven, is a proverbial expression for being in a flourishing condition, or in an exalted station: the opposite to this, to be degraded and ruined, is expressed by being brought down to hell; not to the place of punishment reserved for the wicked, but to the grave, to the lowest place. The prophet Isaiah says of the king of Babylon, (xiv. 13,) "for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven: I will exalt my throne above the stars of God." Thus he expresses the prosperity which that monarch once enjoyed; but he adds, (verse 15,) "yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."

24. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in a day of punishment, than for thee.

The calamities which shall come upon thee for rejecting my miracles, shall be more dreadful than those which befel Sodom.

25. At that time Jesus answered and said, *or, "said :"* for there is no reply to any thing foregoing ; I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes.

Christ turns away from the painful consideration of the rejection of his doctrine by the inhabitants of the great cities and learned men of that age, together with the dreadful calamities which would ensue thence, to admire the wisdom of God, as displayed in such an order of things. It would hereby appear to future generations that the gospel of Christ was not established in the world by the authority of the great, but by the force of its own evidence, which first made an impression upon the minds of the lower classes of mankind. As if he had said ; " I admire the wisdom of thy Providence, O thou sovereign disposer of all things, that in the course of it, the gospel should be received by those who are held in contempt by men famed for their wisdom and prudence in the world ; as it will thereby have less the appearance of being a scheme of worldly policy, countenanced by the powers of this world ; and therefore will appear, in distant ages, more credible, and more likely to have come from God."

26. Even so, *i. e. I thank thee*, Father : for so, "*because so,*" it seemed good in thy sight.

We are not to understand by this language, that there was no good reason why God was so pleased ; but that he had the best reasons for his conduct, such as we have just mentioned, and for which he deserved the highest praise.

27. All things are delivered to me of my Father ; "*my Father hath instructed me in all things ;*" and no man, "*no one,*" knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

The great and learned among the Jews had rejected the Messiah ; yet, notwithstanding the contempt with which he was treated, he claimed to himself the high honour of possessing a complete knowledge of the secret designs of the Divine Being, respecting the salvation of mankind, and the disposal of every thing that was necessary for this purpose. The words may be thus paraphrased. " All things that relate to the reception and propagation of the gospel, are delivered to me by my Father : he only is perfectly acquainted with the full extent of my commission ; with what is requisite for its success, and with what will be its final result ; and it

is his will that the true knowledge and worship of himself, in all future ages, should be communicated to mankind by means of my gospel, all the rest of mankind being sunk in gross ignorance and idolatry." It is necessary to understand the language of Christ as here referring to the gospel, and not to any supreme dominion over the whole creation, with which he is supposed to be invested ; because it is of the gospel that he is here speaking, and after saying that all things were delivered to him by his Father, he adds immediately ; "no man knoweth the Father save the Son ;" which shows that it is of knowledge, and not of power that he speaks.

28. Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

This knowledge of the true God I am desirous of communicating unto all ; and it is peculiarly comfortable and reviving to those who are oppressed with a sense of their ignorance and guilt : all such, without exception, I invite to come to me, that they may find true rest and peace in the belief of the gospel, and in the practice of the duties which it enjoins. The burthens which I shall impose upon you, are lighter than those of Moses ; the duties that I prescribe will promote your present as well as your future happiness ; it is not my disposition or wish to impose any other.

29. Take my yoke upon you, *submit to my commands* ; and learn of me ; *submit yourselves to my instruction*. For I am meek and lowly in heart.

There is no reason why you should fear me on account of a consciousness of guilt : you will have in me a teacher who is mild and benign, not severe and morose like the Pharisees.

And ye shall find rest unto your souls ; "*relief and comfort to your minds*."

30. For my yoke is easy, and my burthen is light.*

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the conduct of the Pharisees towards Christ and John the Baptist, we may see that men who dislike the truth, are never at a loss for reasons for rejecting it, and that they have often recourse to the most absurd and inconsistent principles, for this purpose. Having nothing to object to the doctrines taught, they find fault with the preachers : they pretend to dislike John, because his manners were austere, and Jesus, for a totally opposite reason,

* "The gracious invitation contained in the last verses of this chapter, where my text is, seems peculiarly adapted to the laborious poor, and probably was addressed to a number of them, whom Jesus saw engaged in some toilsome occupation ; perhaps in harvest-work : for it appears, from the words immediately following, that the corn was ripe. See Chap. xii. 1." Turner's Sermon. p. 254.

because his manners were the reverse of those of his predecessor, free and popular : but the real ground of their dislike to both was that pure and strict morality which they practised themselves, and inculcated upon others. The teachers of religion may learn hence the folly of accommodating their manners to the corrupt taste of the age in which they live, with the hope of gaining a greater degree of attention to their instructions. The persons whom they address will still find something to plead for disregarding them, either in the substance of what they preach, in their manner of teaching, or their mode of life. Instead of studying, therefore, to please men by their conduct, whom, after all, it is impossible to satisfy, let them pursue that course of life which in their own conscience, they shall esteem to be right. In this manner, without intending it, they will most effectually secure the approbation of the wise and good : for wisdom is justified of her children. They must not, however, be surprised, if they are charged by some with unnecessary strictness, or scandalous licentiousness : the best characters have not escaped such censures.

2. Let us all joyfully accept of this gracious invitation, made to us by Christ, to come to him. You cannot go to a kinder or an abler master : his precepts are reasonable and just ; there is nothing in them of pharisaical superstition, or monkish severity : they are what your own consciences must approve ; they are adapted to the wants of the human mind, and calculated to promote your interest, honour, and comfort. There is no one so well qualified to instruct you as he ; all things are delivered to him of the Father ; he is fully acquainted with the purposes and counsels of the Almighty, respecting the salvation of the human race ; and he is authorized by him to communicate them to the world. If you trust to your own reason, to heathen philosophers, or to Jewish Rabbies, their information will be erroneous or defective ; but in him you have an infallible guide. Renounce, then, the tyranny of your passions, and the authority of custom ; renounce the name of every human master, and place yourself at the feet of this divine teacher. Take the history of his life into your hands ; carefully meditate upon the invaluable truths which it contains, and form your opinions and practice by the rule which he has laid down for you. To this the Saviour invites you, in the mild language of benevolence and friendship ; but he has likewise more alarming motives with which to address you. For,

3. If you refuse to listen to his invitations, you must expect severe punishment. Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, the cities in which were performed most of his mighty works, were esteemed more hardened than the most corrupt cities of the heathens, than such as were abandonedly wicked to a proverb, than Tyre and Sidon, than Sodom and Gomorrah ; and were punished for their impenitence with severer calamities, in proportion to their greater guilt. In their sufferings you may read the measure of your own doom, if you persist in rejecting the yoke of Christ. His mighty works, although not performed before your eyes, are yet communicated to you by a history every way credible : you are well acquainted with his character, and have before you the whole of the

Christian scheme, which was delivered only partially to many of the auditors of Christ. If, with all these advantages, you refuse to come to Christ, to learn your duty of him, it is no ordinary doom which awaits you. The punishment of the most profligate heathen will be light, when compared with yours : you have resisted stronger motives to repentance, and sinned against greater light ; you have therefore deserved greater punishment. To-day then, if you will hear this voice, harden not your hearts.

SECTION XXV.

Christ discourses on the observance of the Sabbath.

MATTHEW xii. 1—13.

1. AT that time Jesus went, on the sabbath-day, through the corn ; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath day.

The law of Moses allowed of plucking the ears of corn in a neighbour's field, to satisfy hunger ; although not of putting in the sickle ; it was not to this, therefore, that the Pharisees objected, but to doing it on the sabbath-day. This action, their superstitious notions led them to exaggerate into a kind of reaping, which was prohibited on the sabbath : it appeared to them inconsistent likewise with another law, which forbade them to dress meat, or provide food on that day.

3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him ?

4. How he entered into the house of God, *i. e. the tabernacle* : for the temple was not at this time erected ; and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him ; but only for the priests ?

Christ here draws an argument in favour of the conduct of his disciples from the example of David, in a case exactly similar to theirs : for being destitute of food, during his flight from Saul, he applied to Abimelech the high-priest for bread ; but he having none to offer him, except the loaves which had been presented before God, he accepted of them for himself, and distributed them among his companions. This action was irregular, and contrary to the letter of the law, which enjoined that twelve loaves of bread should

be placed on a table in the tabernacle, every sabbath-day, which, after remaining there a week, were to be removed, and eaten by the priests, but by no other persons. David, therefore, transgressed the law upon this occasion : but his conduct was justified by the necessity of the case. As the Pharisees allowed this with respect to him, they ought to admit it likewise in regard to the disciples, who were placed in circumstances of similar necessity : or, if they condemned the conduct of the disciples of Christ, while they approved of that of David, it appeared that they were influenced by unreasonable prejudices.

5. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days, the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless ?

The priests in the temple slew the victims for sacrifice on the sabbath, and performed other actions which might be considered as servile employments, and which were the business of common days : yet this was deemed no profanation of the day, because it was necessary for the worship of God : upon the same principles the action of the disciples in rubbing ears of corn to procure food for themselves, while they were employed in the important office of instructing the people, ought not to be considered as a violation of the sabbath.

6. But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater, "*something greater,*" than the temple.

In this, Christ has been generally supposed to refer to himself, and to intimate that as he was so superior to the temple, he had authority to dispense, in particular circumstances, with the law relating to the sabbath. It appears, however, more probable that he alludes to the more useful employment in which he and his disciples were engaged, when compared with the services of the temple ; as if he had said ; " the things which take place here, and in which I employ my disciples, are greater and more necessary than those which pass in the temple, and, therefore, better fitted to be performed on the sabbath-day. The healing of human maladies, and the instruction of sinners, which so constantly employ them, that they have not time to provide food for the sabbath, on the other days, are in reality more excellent than all the ceremonial worship of the law." This is the second argument which our Lord uses to justify the conduct of his followers : he now has recourse to a third.

7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, "*I love mercy better than a sacrifice,*" ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

This passage is taken from Hosea, and has been quoted by Christ once already, when its meaning was explained. See Matt. ix. 13, and the note on that passage. By applying it to the present case, Christ intimates that the work in which he and his disciples were engaged, was of greater importance than ceremonial

observances, and consequently, was not to be interrupted on account of them.

8. For the son of man is lord even of the sabbath-day.

Those are mistaken, says Grotius, who understand by son of man, in this place, Christ in particular : for Christ while he lived in the world, professed himself subject to the law ; neither pretending to abrogate it, nor to derogate from its authority, but interpreting it from the will of the Father, and confirming his interpretations both by the authority of the law, and by arguments drawn from what is right and just. The son of man, therefore, in this place, means any man, which Mark renders so plain that it cannot easily be controverted : for thus it is that Christ speaks, according to him ; “ for the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath ; therefore, the son of man is lord also of the sabbath : ” for if we should understand by son of man in this passage the Messiah, sent with power to annul the law, the words will not at all connect together : whereas, there is a very obvious connexion between the two verses, if we suppose that he is speaking of mankind in general. To this it may be added, that Christ had not yet published to the people that he was the Messiah, nor did he wish, for well-known reasons, that he should be proclaimed under that character. The sense of the words then is this, by which is expressed a little more fully by Mark : “ Whatever is provided for the sake of another, ought to yield to that for the sake of which it is provided ; but the sabbath being instituted for the sake of man, it ought to yield to man, whenever his benefit is concerned.” He may be said to be lord of any thing who has power of using it for his own benefit : so, in this case, man is said to be lord of the sabbath, because, it is not to be observed so as to occasion his detriment.

9. And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue :

10. And behold, there was a man which had his hand withered, and they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day ? that they might accuse him.

11. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, “ *a sheep* ; ” and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out ?

The common interpretation of the law among the Jews admitted of some exceptions ; and, particularly, the respect which was due to the sabbath, did not forbid them to provide for the life of a beast : this would, therefore, afford Jesus a sufficient justification of what he was about to do, and furnish an answer to their question. Lest the Pharisees should object that in the case of their exception, the life of a creature was concerned, but in the present

case, only the restoration of a limb to a sound state, Christ anticipates them, by showing that a man is so much better than a sheep, that the healing of him might be justly thought of more consequence than the life of the sheep : for he says,

12. How much then is a man better than a sheep ? Wherefore it is lawful to do well, *i. e. to perform acts of beneficence*, on the sabbath-days.

13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand ; and he stretched it forth, and it was restored, whole like the other.

The true doctrine concerning the sabbath being explained, Christ now cuts off all pretence for calumny : for, without touching him, by his voice alone, he heals the man ; which could not even have the appearance of violating the sabbath.

REFLECTIONS.

IN the conduct of Christ, in suffering his disciples to perform an action which many would consider as a profanation of the sabbath, and in justifying them in it afterwards, we may learn our duty in regard to those observances which the folly or superstition of mankind has added to the law of God ; that we ought not to countenance them, even by our actions, much less by our words. Several considerations might have been suggested to Christ, to induce him to act differently. By countenancing his disciples, in what the Pharisees apprehended to be a profanation of the sabbath, he would expose himself and his followers to the imputation of impiety ; a charge, which would not only be highly dishonourable in itself, but likewise prevent the reception of those new doctrines which he came to preach. The error to be corrected was but of a trifling nature, and perhaps on the safer side. From his compliance with the prejudices of the people in this instance, they might have formed a more favourable opinion of his character, and have been better disposed to listen to his instructions : but in the estimation of Christ, these were the maxims of worldly prudence. To countenance men in adding to or misinterpreting the law, would have been setting up their authority, in opposition to that of God : and although the evil arising from it in this instance, might be inconsiderable, it would be authorizing more important additions in other cases ; which might be productive of infinite mischief. In his estimation, a strict adherence to the law was the best way of honouring it, and the promotion of truth of more consequence than popularity. He therefore resolutely withstood the impositions of the Scribes and Pharisees, and has hereby given us an example of courage and fortitude, which well deserves our imitation in like circumstances. When we are called upon to comply with rites and ceremonies which have a fair show of piety and devotion, let us ask what authority men have for them in the Christian revelation ; and if they are not enjoined by this authori-

ty, let us not scruple to reject them. If we expose ourselves hereby to the charge of obstinacy or impiety, let us not regard it : it is no more than our Lord and Master endured before us.

SECTION XXVI.

Christ withdraws from his enemies. He cures a dæmoniac, and refutes the cavils of the Pharisees.

MATTHEW xii. 14—30.

14. THEN the Pharisees went out, *out of the synagogue, where, we learn from verse 9th, these things passed* ; and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

This was no regular assembly : for the Pharisees were not an incorporated body ; but it was a private meeting of some bigoted members of that sect, who were so highly enraged at Jesus, when they found that he did not conform to their superstitious practices, but openly disregarded and condemned them, that they resolved to put him to death.

15. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence ; and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all.

That is, all those who had need of healing : in such a limited sense these general expressions are frequently to be interpreted in the New Testament. It was not from a regard to his own personal safety, that Christ now retired ; but lest he should provoke the Jews to put him to death, before the purposes of his mission had been accomplished.

16. And charged them that they should not make him known.

This he might be induced to do from the motive last mentioned ; likewise, lest the people, apprehending him to be the Messiah, a prince come to establish a temporal dominion over them, should excite insurrections in his favour, and hereby create alarm in the Roman government. He wished also to avoid all appearance of vanity and ambition, and therefore prohibited those who were cured by him, from making known his miracles, lest he should seem to court popular applause, and to have in view his own glory, and not the success of true religion. This is the motive to which the evangelist Matthew seems to refer this part of his conduct, as appears from the following quotation which he makes from the prophet Isaiah, and applies to Jesus, for whom, likewise, it was originally intended.

17. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

By the humility which Christ discovered, in forbidding those who were cured by him, to make him known, it appeared that the character of Jesus corresponded with that given of the Messiah in Isaiah, xlii. 1.

18. Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased; I will put my spirit upon him; and he shall show judgment, "*true religion*," to the Gentiles.

The spirit here spoken of, which God is said to put upon Christ, is the miraculous powers which he possessed, by which he was enabled to perform the cure before mentioned, and to teach the doctrines of the gospel. The word judgment signifies the new law of God under the Christian dispensation, and is the word by which the law of Moses is often expressed in the Old Testament. Thus we often read in the Psalms of the statutes and judgments of God, by which we are to understand the laws and ordinances of the Mosaic œconomy; but Jesus Christ was appointed to publish a new law, which he was to declare not only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles also, even to the whole world.

19. He shall not strive nor cry, "*nor be clamorous*;" neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

In Luke, (xiii. 26,) those who were shut out from the kingdom of heaven at the last day are represented as pleading with Jesus; "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets;" but although he sometimes taught in the streets, his voice was not that of clamour and violence, which are calculated to excite disturbances; but it was the voice of reason and instruction. Whenever the multitude which attended him became so great as to be likely to produce tumults and disorders, he withdrew to mountains and desert places.

20. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth, "*whilst he is bringing*," judgment unto victory.

The first of these expressions, "a bruised reed shall he not break," is a figurative way of speaking, denoting that the gentleness of Christ was so great, that he would not hurt even that which of itself was ready to perish. The second, "and smoking flax shall he not quench," was intended to signify the same thing in different words, agreeably to the genius of the Hebrew poetry. A metaphor is borrowed from these objects, to express how unwilling Christ is to destroy or neglect the smallest tendency to repentance or goodness in the human mind: he feeds and cherishes the dying flame, and endeavours to light it up again. Judgment signifies the same here as in the former verse, the law of God; and it is foretold that Christ should observe the conduct above described, while he was rendering it victorious, that is, while he was establish-

ing the Christian religion in the world, amidst the calumnies and threatenings of his enemies.

21. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

As it was usual for the followers of every teacher of new doctrines, to call themselves after his name, the name of a teacher came at length to be put for his doctrine. Hence Paul says that he baptized no one in his own name, meaning, that he was the author of no new doctrine, and implying, that to be baptized into the name of Christ, is to be baptized into his religion. The name of Christ, therefore, signifies, in this passage, the same thing as the religion of Christ; and in the profession of that religion, it is foretold, the Gentiles would place their confidence.

22. Then was brought unto him one possessed with a dæmon, blind and dumb; and he healed him; insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

The persons mentioned in the New Testament, as possessed with dæmons, were either madmen or epileptics: but these disorders were sometimes attended with other complaints of a grievous nature, arising from the same or some other cause. In the case before us, the dæmoniac was both blind and dumb: his madness was probably of that species which is called melancholy madness, of which, taciturnity is a common symptom. This will account for his being called dumb; and, as it has been observed by physicians, that madness is often accompanied with the loss of sight, there is no reason to be surprised that we find the same dæmoniac blind. In another instance, we find the person supposed to be possessed, deaf likewise: for the humour, or what else occasions madness, falling upon the organs of hearing, might produce the loss of hearing as well as the loss of sight.*

23. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

The son of David signified the same thing as Messiah among the Jews: for it was from the family of David that they expected him to descend who came in that character. The extraordinary nature of the miracle which he had just performed, might with good reason lead them to conclude, that Jesus was he; because, as the Messiah was to be superior to all other prophets, it might naturally be supposed that he would be distinguished from them by the magnitude of his miracles, as well as by other circumstances.

24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out dæmons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the dæmons.

Beelzebub, as we find from the history of the Old Testament,

* Farmer on Dæmoniacs, p. 114, &c.

was God of Ekron, and, like the other gods of the heathens, a deified human spirit. He was supposed by the Jews, or by the heathens, for it was from them that they first borrowed the doctrine, to be prince of possessing dæmons; to have a number of these agents under his command; and to be able to send them to occupy the bodies of men; or to dispossess them, whenever he pleased. With this prince, the Jews pretended, Christ was associated, and by his assistance, wrought the cure upon the dæmoniac, which has just been related.

25. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not "*cannot*" stand.

26. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

"Our Saviour is here arguing with men who did not acknowledge his divine authority, upon their own principles, as he was wont to do, that he might silence, if he could not instruct them; telling them that it was unreasonable to impute his cure of dæmoniacs to the assistance of the prince of dæmons, since, if the miracle consisted in the ejection of dæmons, it was, in its very nature, an act of hostility against them; and Satan could not be supposed to assist in overturning his own empire."*

"Because Beelzebub is here called Satan by Christ, and the word Satan is, in other instances, applied to the devil, it has been inferred, that Beelzebub and the devil are the same person, under different names; and an argument has been drawn hence for the reality of possessions by the devil: but there is no force in this argument: for the term Satan is not appropriated to one particular person or spirit, but signifies an adversary or opponent in general; it is sometimes applied in Scripture to a good angel, who is called a Satan; even Peter is called by this name, because he was an adversary to our Lord's designs. As Christ is here speaking to the Pharisees upon their own principles, he must be supposed to speak of the same order of beings as they did. Satan must, therefore, be equivalent to dæmon, in the sense in which dæmon was used by them, for the spirit of a dead man. All that Christ means to say, is, that it was unreasonable to suppose that one dæmon or one Satan would cast out another."†

27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out dæmons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges.

By the children of the Pharisees we are to understand their disciples and followers, or the Jews; (in the same manner as by sons of the prophets we are to understand their disciples, who undertook to cast out dæmons in the name of the God of Abraham, but who did not succeed in their attempts; and our Lord reproaches

* Farmer on Miracles, p. 392.

† Farmer on dæmoniacs, p. 14, &c.

the manifest inconsistency of their conduct, in imputing his cure of dæmoniacs to Beelzebub, when they ascribed to God the pretended success of their own exorcisms.

28. But if I cast out dæmons by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

If I, by the power of God, and not by the assistance of any evil being, have wrought what ye have lately seen, the miracle is of such an extraordinary nature as to prove that the kingdom of the Messiah is already begun among you.

29. Or else, how can one enter into a strong man's house, "*into the house of the strong one,*" and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong one? and then he will spoil his house.

Christ had already proved that the power by which he cast out dæmons, was opposite to that which they attributed to Beelzebub: he now shows that he must be superior to his, upon their own principles: for as it is impossible for a person to rob the house of one that is stronger than himself, unless he first bind or disable him; so, it would have been impossible for Christ to have cast out dæmons, unless he had been stronger than Beelzebub, whom they considered the prince of dæmons.

30. He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

This is a proverbial maxim, which Christ applies to the present case; and the meaning which he intends to convey is this: "if it be a just maxim, that he who is to be regarded as an enemy, who only refuses his assistance, will you account me a friend and confederate with Beelzebub, who directly oppose and dispossess him?"

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the conduct of these Pharisees, we see how consistent a warm zeal for outward observances may be with a total disregard of the most essential rules of morality. While these superstitious hypocrites are offended at the disciples of Jesus for failing in the reverence which they apprehended due to the sabbath, we find them plotting, without remorse, the death of an innocent and perfect character. We may learn hence, in what estimation we ought to hold such observances: as the means of religious improvement they are certainly useful; but if we regard them as the most important parts of religion, and rest satisfied with the mere performance of them, without regarding the effects which they produce upon our temper or lives, our zeal is directed towards a wrong object, and we fall into a fatal error. We shall be transported with a fond conceit of our own excellence, and despise others, while the heart is corrupted with the most unworthy passions, and the conduct disgraced with every kind of enormity. Let us not judge of

ourselves or others by the degree of attention paid to ceremonies, but by the substantial virtues of piety, justice, benevolence, and humility. Wherever these flourish, there is true religion : but if they be wanting, our zeal about other matters is no better than hypocrisy.

2. We have here a just and noble description of the character of Jesus. He was furnished with the most extraordinary powers, and adorned with the most excellent virtues : he was eminent for his piety, benevolence, integrity, fortitude, meekness, and patience ; and all these virtues were accompanied with humility, which gives a lustre and perfection to every other grace. If any one had any thing whereof to boast, it was Christ : he was furnished with the most extraordinary powers, greater than ever had been communicated to any human being before, by which he was enabled to cure, by a word's speaking, the most inveterate diseases : he was enriched with treasures of wisdom and knowledge : he was honoured with audible and public testimonials of the divine favour, by a voice from heaven ; yet these distinguished favours were far from filling the mind of Christ with sentiments of pride or ambition : on the contrary, he endeavoured to conceal his mighty works, and to prevent a crowd of people from following him : he was not anxious to proclaim the things which redounded to his own glory, but took pains to prevent them from being published abroad. Hence we may learn that true greatness is accompanied with humility, and that there is often the most worth, where there is the least outward show and noise.

3. We see, from what has been read, by whose power the miracles of Christ were performed. Not by any assistance derived from the spirits of dead men, much less by the power of the devil : not by any natural power, which belonged to Christ himself ; but by the finger of God. It was his hand which wrought all the wonderful things which appeared to proceed from his Son ; and it is on this account that they afford us such satisfactory proof that the kingdom of God is come unto us ; for we are sure that a pure and holy God would not alter the course of nature, in order to support a lie, or to give countenance to an impostor.

SECTION XXVII.

Of evil speaking against the Holy Spirit.

MATTHEW xii. 31—37.

31. WHEREFORE I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy, "*evil speaking*," shall be forgiven unto men ; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, "*the evil speaking against the Spirit*," shall not be forgiven unto men.

These words refer to what had passed before ; particularly to the Pharisees' declaring that Jesus cast out dæmons by Beelzebub,

the prince of the dæmons ; thus attributing his miracles not to God, by whose power or spirit they were performed, but to the influence of evil beings. This discovered the most wilful blindness and depraved malignity. Every kind of calumny is a crime of great enormity, and pardoned by God with great difficulty ; but to speak evil of God himself, by attributing his beneficent and miraculous works to a wicked being, was a sin of the deepest dye, much more difficult to be forgiven. This seems to be all that is to be understood by these words ; and, if thus interpreted, they are to be considered as a method of expressing a comparison between one thing and another, which was common among the Hebrews, and of which we have several examples in Scripture, where one thing is affirmed and another denied, and yet no more intended than that the former is more excellent, more easy, or more difficult, than the second. In this manner God is represented as saying, “ I will have mercy and not sacrifice ;” meaning hereby, not that sacrifices were disagreeable to him, in themselves ; but that acts of beneficence were more acceptable. So Matthew says, “ Till heaven and earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, until all be fulfilled ;” which Luke explains, by saying, “ it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.” In the same manner, Christ, in the text, seems to say that every other kind of evil speaking may be forgiven : but that to speak evil of God, or his Spirit, shall not be forgiven : when no more is intended than that it is more difficult to obtain forgiveness for the one than the other. There are others, however, who plead for understanding these words literally, and suppose that they declare, that to speak evil of the Spirit of God, in the manner before mentioned, is an unpardonable offence ; either because the persons who are guilty of it, rejecting the evidence of miracles, resist the strongest motive to repentance which God can give ; or, because the crime is of too enormous a nature to come within the reach of the divine mercy. But it does not seem probable in itself that any sin, committed by creatures of such limited capacities as we are, can be so heinous as to leave no hope of pardon, when sincerely repented of ; nor does it appear that our Lord himself thought it unpardonable : for when he was put to death by these Pharisees, who had been guilty of this offence, he prays for them that God would forgive them. To this it may be added, that a few verses below, we find these Pharisees ask for a sign, and Christ tells them that one shall be given them, even that of the prophet Jonas : but why should this sign be given them, except for their conviction, that they might obtain forgiveness ?

32. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him ; neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Christ is still labouring to impress upon his hearers a just sense of the enormity of the crime of speaking evil of the Holy Spirit,

or the power of God ; by adopting a fresh comparison, taken from himself, considered as a person of perfect character. To speak evil of me, a person of such excellent temper and unblameable behaviour, is indeed an offence of no small magnitude ; but it is of a trivial nature, when compared with that of reviling the Divine Being himself, by attributing his works to a malevolent author. This is an instance of wickedness which can with much greater difficulty be pardoned, either in this world, or in that which is to come. The language of Christ, upon this occasion, is a strong way of expressing how difficult it is for such a sinner to obtain pardon.

The Jews spoke against Christ, as the Son of man, when they threw out insinuations against his moral character, saying, " Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber ; a friend of publicans and sinners ;" and when they charged him with perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar : but when they misrepresented his miraculous powers, it was not him but God that they traduced.

33. Either make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, "*bad*," and his fruit bad : for the tree is known by his fruit.

The meaning of which is, Since you cannot but acknowledge that to cast out dæmons is good fruit, you ought to acknowledge that the tree which produced it, is a good tree ; or, if you deny that, you ought to say that to cast out dæmons is bad fruit, which is too absurd to be maintained. Thus you ought to reason, if you would be consistent : for the fruit always takes the quality of the tree. In this manner Christ endeavours to make the Pharisees acknowledge the divine origin of his doctrine, from their own concessions ; or to expose their folly and inconsistency in rejecting it as bad.

34. O generation of vipers, "*O brood of vipers*," how can ye, being evil, speak good things ? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Take an example, says Christ, of the truth of the observation which I have just made, from yourselves : for since you are wicked at your hearts, we perceive that what you say is wicked ; neither can it be otherwise : for the disposition, however concealed, will easily express itself by external actions. The impossibility here spoken of is that which arises from the force of bad habit, and is of the same nature with that which is spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah, when he says, " Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may ye, who have been accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." Bad men may sometimes say good things : Christ, however, is not here speaking of one or two instances, but of the general practice of those whose hearts are corrupt.

35. A good man, out of the good treasure, "*treasury*," of the heart, bringeth forth good things ; and an evil man, out of the evil treasury, bringeth forth evil things.

The source of evil words and actions is an evil heart, with which they correspond as naturally and necessarily, as the contents of a treasury must correspond with the character which it bears.

36. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.

By idle word, Christ does not mean that which is trifling or indifferent ; but that which is false or injurious ; such as those speeches which the Pharisees had made respecting his miracles. *Idle* seems to be used here in the same manner as *vain* is by the Hebrews, who by vain words mean lying words. In the language of Scripture, as well as in that of other authors, more is frequently implied than is expressed. Thus, Prov. xviii. 5, it is said to be “not good,” to accept the person of the wicked ; by which is meant, that it is bad ; and Ephes. v. 11, the works of wickedness are called “unfruitful,” when the idea intended to be conveyed by that term is that they are pernicious. So, here, words are called idle which are in reality, false, malevolent, and injurious. Of those, which in any degree bear that character, men must give an account ; how much more, Christ intimates, of such wicked calumnies as the Pharisees had just been uttering !

37. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

By your words you may be acquitted or condemned. If other facts should be wanting, these will afford evidence sufficient for your conviction.

REFLECTIONS.

1. THE explanation which has been given of the nature of the sin against the Holy Ghost, may afford relief to those who are distressed with the apprehension of having committed it. It consisted, as we have seen, in attributing the miraculous works of the Spirit of God to evil beings, and in doing this not through those errors to which human weakness at all times exposes men, but through wilful obstinacy and blindness ; an offence which Christians cannot easily fall into, and which, it seems, those only are capable of committing, who reject Christianity entirely, and deride the evidence by which it is supported. Nor does it appear that, even in this case, their crime is declared unpardonable, if they sincerely repent of it. Let not then any humble penitent be discouraged. Art thou overwhelmed with a sense of the number and heinousness of thy offences ? Dost thou think them too great to be forgiven ? Let not thy heart indulge despair : God now calls upon all men every where to repent, and he offers mercy to all who will accept it, not excluding the chief of sinners.

2. From what has been said, we may learn that calumny or evil speaking is no light offence against God : for every word of this kind we shall be called to give an account, and this alone, without any other crime, will be sufficient to procure our condemnation. Christ, indeed, declares that it may be forgiven : this, however, shows that it is a crime of no small magnitude : for otherwise such a declaration would have been unnecessary. To take pleasure in reviling the characters of our brethren ; to accuse them of crimes which they have never committed, or even industriously to report their failings, discovers a malignant disposition of mind, and makes men resemble him whose character it is to accuse. From such a temper infinite mischiefs arise to society ; the feelings of individuals are wounded in the most sensible manner : the peace of families is destroyed, and the community disturbed. Let us take care that we do not indulge in so base and mischievous a vice. By many it is regarded as a matter of amusement, thus to sport with the comfort of mankind ; but if we have any respect for the principles of humanity, or any fear of the displeasure of an impartial judge, we shall hold it in abhorrence. In judging of the characters of men, let us follow the rule which Christ has here laid down, and then we shall stand at a remote distance from calumny : let us judge of the tree by its fruits, of the man by his words and actions. Following this maxim, we shall never impute to men wicked intentions, where there is nothing in their conduct to justify such suspicions. Instead of saying that all those must be bad who differ from us in religious sentiments, because their opinions have an evil tendency, we shall conclude all men to be good in their hearts, who are irreproachable in their lives. If the actions of others should be of a doubtful nature, Christian candour and benevolence will incline us to take the favourable side. This caution is at all times necessary ; more particularly, at a season of general suspicion and alarm, when the violence of men's passions inclines them to believe that those who oppose their wishes entertain bad designs.

SECTION XXVIII.

The Scribes and Pharisees demand a sign.

MATTHEW xii. 38—42.

38. THEN certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

A sign is frequently used for any kind of miracle, of whatever nature it might be. But in this instance it seems to be employed for something different from the miraculous cure of diseases ; something more excellent and striking ; many examples of this these Pharisees had seen from Jesus ; but with these they were not satisfied. Moses had given them manna from heaven ; Samuel

had produced thunder and hail; Elijah had sent down fire and rain: some miracles of this nature the Pharisees probably required: for in the sixteenth chapter of this gospel, the same persons ask him for a sign from heaven. They might pretend that there was room for imposture, in regard to the miracles performed on the earth, but that to the heavens the art of man did not reach. "If thou be the Messiah, show that thou hast not less power than former prophets." This they said not with a view to have their faith in him established, but that they might have an opportunity of objecting to him. If he had exhibited what they desired, they would still have found out some objection; pretending, either that by some deception of the sight, that which appeared to them did not really exist; or that the great distance prevented them from making distinct observation; or assigning some other reason for rejecting his miracles. To which may be added, that terrible signs suited the severity of the law, but beneficent miracles, the person of the Messiah.

39. But he answered, and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.

By an adulterous generation, Christ meant such as had departed from the law of God, by setting up their traditions in the place or it, or in addition to it. This is here called adultery; in the Old Testament that term is applied to those Israelites who forsook the worship of the true God, for that of idols; but it is generally supposed that the Jews were no longer addicted to this sin, after the Babylonish captivity, their sufferings at that period having cured them of an inclination to it. Others, however, have maintained that idolatrous rites were still practised by many in secret, although not publicly; and that Christ here refers to something of this kind. This opinion seems to be countenanced by the sentiments entertained by the Jews respecting dæmons, which, it is well known, they borrowed from the heathens.*

With respect to the wickedness of the Jews, we have the testimony of one of their own authors, Josephus; who, in speaking of the destruction of their state, says, that as no nation ever suffered such things, so no nation was ever more wicked than that. Such profligate men had no reason to expect any greater or more excellent miracles than those which Christ had already given by the miraculous cure of diseases. Yet, he says that they should be favoured with one of this kind, not indeed from heaven, but from the bowels of the earth, which bore a considerable resemblance to that of the prophet Jonah.

40. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

* Dodson on Isaiah, pp. 156—161.

The heart of the earth is a Jewish phrase for the earth. Thus Tyre is said to be in the heart of the sea, when it was situated on an island, a short distance from the land. Christ here refers to his resurrection from the dead; but it is not likely that the Pharisees or his disciples understood what he meant: this instance, therefore, may serve to show that our Lord adopted language which he did not expect his followers to understand at the time, but which he knew would become intelligible to them after his resurrection: or when their minds were more enlightened.

41. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment, "*in the place of judgment*," with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater, "*something greater*," than Jonas is here.

Christ, having mentioned Jonah in the preceding verse, takes occasion to upbraid the Jews for their obstinacy and unbelief, from a fact mentioned in the history of that prophet; the speedy repentance of the Ninevites, in consequence of receiving a message from God warning them of their danger. This discovered a more ingenuous temper than the Jews had manifested, who had received that superior evidence of miracles which accompanied the preaching of Christ. The conduct of the Ninevites would serve to convict the Jews: for it showed that much inferior advantages were sufficient to produce a change of character. If, therefore, the latter remained impenitent, it must evidently arise from a greater degree of wickedness. Among the Jews and Romans it was usual for witnesses, when they delivered their evidence, to stand up. It is to this that our Saviour alludes, when he says that the men of Nineveh should *rise*, in the place of judgment, against the Jews; meaning hereby, that they would serve as witnesses to condemn them. Christ does not here compare himself and Jonah together; but the advantages enjoyed at the two periods.

42. The queen of the south shall rise up in the place of judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Sheba is generally supposed to have been a country near the extremity of Arabia, which lay south of Judæa; and, being at a great distance, might be called the ends of the earth. A modern traveller concludes from the products of this country and other circumstances, that it was situated near the southern extremity of the continent of Africa. From this distance the queen of Sheba came to Solomon, to propose hard questions to him, as was customary with sovereigns in those times. The wisdom of Solomon consisted, as we learn from his life, in the knowledge of natural history, and still more of every thing which relates to the right conduct of life, and the practice of our duty: but in the Christian dispensation there was something greater than Solomon, the

fulness of divine wisdom, displaying itself in Jesus Christ. The conduct of the Jews in declining to come to Christ for instruction, when he possessed this divine wisdom and brought it to their doors, would be condemned by the queen of the south, who came from so great a distance so hear the wisdom of Solomon.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE see that Christ refers to his resurrection from the dead, as the most convincing sign or proof of his divine mission; and undoubtedly it deserved to be regarded in that important light: for God would not have raised from the dead a wicked impostor, who had pretended to act in his name, and by his authority. By restoring to life a divine messenger, whom the Jews had crucified, God proclaimed to the world that the crimes laid to his charge had no foundation; but that, on the contrary, his character was so pure, as to render him highly acceptable to the Divine Being, and that the respect which he claimed, as the greatest of all prophets, was no more than what he was justly entitled to. In this event, therefore, all Christians may rejoice, as laying a firm and strong foundation for their faith: but there is another reason why they should triumph in the resurrection of Christ: for it was succeeded by an ascension into heaven, and hereby becomes the pledge and security of the same honour to all his followers. The prospect which it affords to us in this view is the most important which can enter the human mind: how delightful and consoling is the hope of meeting our risen Lord and Master; of acknowledging our obligations to him for his eminent services and unparalleled sufferings; of enjoying his company, and the company of all good men, throughout an eternal duration!

2. We may learn how inexcusable we shall be, if we do not repent under the gospel: for their impenitence men may think themselves authorised to offer many apologies; they may plead the want of instruction; the strength of their passions; the force of habit, or some other excuse of a like nature: but it will not save them from condemnation at the day of judgment. It will then be found that many who had less knowledge, and laboured under greater difficulties, than they, have listened to the call of heaven, and repented of their sins. The African, the Indian and wild American, as well as the men of Nineveh, who have regulated their conduct by the principles of virtue, according to the measure of light which they possessed, shall rise up in judgment against better informed Christians: it will be shown that it was not the want of knowledge, or the want of ability, which prevented them from performing the will of God: (for it has been performed by others who were much less favoured than themselves;) but the want of inclination, arising from the hardness of their hearts.

SECTION XXIX.

Dangerous condition of those who relapse into sin. Christ's mother and brethren desire to speak with him.

MATTHEW xii. 43—50.

43. WHEN the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, "*desert places*," seeking rest ; and findeth none.

By the unclean spirit here spoken of, Christ means a dæmon, or the supposed spirit of some wicked man inhabiting the body of the living. This is called unclean, either because it was believed to be wicked, or because a person under the influence of it, or in a state of madness, was led to contract ceremonial impurity. It was a common opinion among the Jews that dæmons frequent desolate places, or, as our translation has it, dry places. The apostle John alludes to this opinion, when he says, Rev. xviii. 2, "Babylon is become the habitation of devils ;" or, as it should be rendered, "dæmons ;" meaning thereby, that it was become desolate : it is to this opinion that our Lord alludes in the passage before us.

44. Then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out ; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, "*ready for his reception*," swept and garnished, "*put in order*."

45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself ; and they enter in, and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.

The sense of these two verses may be thus expressed : "It is commonly supposed that if dæmons leave a man, but return to him, the disorder," which is no other than madness, "comes upon him with seven-fold violence : " for that is all we are to understand by seven other spirits. "So it will be with you ; notwithstanding some appearance of repentance and reformation, on the preaching of John the Baptist and the ministry of the Messiah, your vices will return upon you with double violence, and bring down upon you heavier judgments." Christ here speaks, all along, upon the principles of his hearers, making use of a common notion concerning dæmons, to illustrate the truth of what he was going to say respecting the Jews. The reason of his having recourse to this comparison, seems to have been his having cast out a dæmon in the presence of the multitude. We should say, at the present day, "when a fever is expelled, if the person cured does not take great care of

his health, the same disease returns, and the relapse is much more dangerous and difficult to cure than the original disease." In like manner it is in regard to the man who has begun to break off vicious habits : if he return to them, they become stronger and more inveterate than before. Peter has expressed the same sentiment ; " for if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." 2 Peter, ii. 20.

46. While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

When not only his mother but also his brethren came, and sought very much to speak to him himself, it is likely that they wished to treat with him concerning some important and urgent business. They had probably heard of the design of the Pharisees to kill him, and came to warn him of his danger, and to persuade him to withdraw himself hastily.

47. Then one said unto him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

The crowd which surrounded Jesus was so great that his relations could not approach him. As he was now discharging an important office, in which the whole human race was interested, namely, that of instructing the people, they did wrong to interrupt him : he might therefore intend, by what follows, to reprove them for claiming his attention at this time.

48. But he answered, and said to him that told him, Who is my mother ? and who are my brethren ?

49. And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren :

50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

In these words our Lord declares that his affection for men was not established so much upon the ties of nature as upon excellence of character ; and that wherever they manifested the latter, they had as large a place in his regard as the nearest relative ; not that he would be understood to undervalue a parent or a brother.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WHAT Christ here says of the condition of the man into whom the unclean spirit returns, after having once departed from him, namely, that the last state of this man is worse than the first, contains a serious warning to those who have begun to break off bad habits. If you suffer them to return, your condition will be worse than before ; they will be seven-fold stronger than they were, and render your recovery from them almost hopeless. Have you then begun to recover from some evil habit to which you have been long accustomed ; from a habit of injustice or impiety ; of intemperance, idleness, or debauchery ? Practise the utmost circumspection and watchfulness : your disorder is indeed apparently healed ; but it has left you in a very weak state ; the smallest irregular indulgence will produce a relapse, which, after your strength has been already so much impaired, will be much more dangerous than the first attack. Take care of your new health ; avoid the company and avoid the places where your habits have been indulged, lest they should bring to your remembrance your sinful pleasures, and revive the inclination to indulge in them : resist every temptation to return to your former course of life, although it be but for a moment. You may resolve that it shall be only for once ; but you will not probably be able to adhere to that resolution, and having once turned back into your former course, you will walk in it to the end of your days.

2. Let us learn to imitate the noble example of Christ, in esteeming every man a brother who does the will of God. There is something in this conduct which discovers an enlarged mind and exalted character ; virtue is so much esteemed that it entitles the object in which it appears to the warmest affection. Wherever it be found, it produces an union more powerful than any which is contracted by the bonds of nature. If our benevolence be confined to our own relatives or friends, to our own religious sect, to our own countrymen, or to men of our own colour, it is limited, partial, and defective ; we may still, indeed, deserve to be called good ; but our goodness is of the lowest kind ; it is not like the benevolence of our Master, which extended to all men who bore the image of God, and was proportioned in degree to the measure of that resemblance. After his example, let us learn to esteem men who are virtuous, whatever their character or condition may be in other respects ; although their talents and endowments be inconsiderable, and their external circumstances mean ; although their sentiments on religion, civil government, and a variety of other topics, be totally different from ours ; although they inhabit not the same country, speak not the same language, and have not the same colour. Wherever we find a good man, there let us reckon that we have found a friend and a brother. In such a temper we have no inconsiderable proof of our own goodness ; but without it, we may be assured that we are but imperfect Christians.

SECTION XXX.

The parable of the Sower.

MATTHEW xiii. 1—23.

1. THE same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea-side.

The number of thoss who came to hear him was so great, that the house in which he was would not contain them, and they were thus prevented from hearing his instructions : he therefore removed to an open place, where he could be heard to more advantage, and, as was the custom with the Jewish teachers, he sat down to teach.

2. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him ; so that he went into a ship and sat ; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

The crowd was still too great to hear him with convenience : he therefore removed into a ship, where he could be no longer pressed and thronged by the multitude, and might be conspicuous to all.

3. And he spake many things to them in parables,

A parable signifies, in general, a comparison of things that differ, and is used for the sake of greater strength or perspicuity of expression. The Hebrews used to call every figurative speech by this name ; and, as proverbs were generally delivered in such language, all proverbs, whether they contained a figure or not, received that name. Thus we are told that our Lord called the people unto him, and said unto them in parables, “ how can Satan cast out Satan ? and if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand,” &c. but the parables in this chapter are continued comparisons, or extended similitudes, in which the reception which the gospel should meet with from different persons, and the progress that it should make in the world, are represented by sensible images, drawn from the common occurrences of life.

Saying, Behold a sower went forth to sow ;

4. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side ; and the fowls came and devoured them up.

The ground by the way-side, which is usually beaten by men’s treading upon it, is an image of those whose hearts are so hardened by impiety that the gospel makes no impression at all upon them : for they either never attend to it, or, if they do attend, it is quickly driven from their memory. This insensibility and inattention are

fitly represented by the beaten ground, into which the seed never enters, but is either bruised by the foot of men, or picked up by birds.

5. Some fell upon stony places, "*rocky places*," where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth.

6. And when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had not root, they withered away.

The plant which finds no soil to cause its roots to strike downwards, exerts so much the greater force upwards. This rocky ground represents those hearers upon whom the word makes some impression, producing good resolutions, perhaps a partial reformation of conduct, and the temporary practice of some virtues : but when persecution arises on account of their Christian profession ; when they are threatened with fines, imprisonment, and death, or with the lighter evils of disgrace and infamy ; or visited with any other severe trial, in the ordinary course of life ; they are disgusted with their new profession, abandon the right way upon which they had entered, and return to their former course of life. Such persons are fitly compared to vegetables which quickly spring up, but, having no depth of soil, wither away, when they are exposed to the heat of the mid-day sun.

7. And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up and choked them.

The ground full of thorns, which sprung up with the seed, and choked it, represents those who received the word, but whose minds are full of worldly cares which destroy whatever good resolutions or good impressions may have been produced there.

8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold.

The good ground represents those who receive the word and understand it, and who bring forth fruit, in good actions, proportioned to the talents and opportunities with which God is pleased to favour them. As different soils to which the seed is committed produce different crops of grain, according to the degree of fertility possessed by each ; some of them yielding, in those eastern climates, a hundred-fold ; so it will be with the gospel. It will produce different effects upon the minds of men who receive it, according as they happen to be previously disposed : according as their dispositions are more or less virtuous, or their vicious habits more or less confirmed.

9. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

These words are often used by Christ, when he has delivered any thing of great importance, and deserving the serious attention of mankind. As if he had said, " You, whom God has furnished with understanding, in order that you may acquire useful knowl-

edge, remember your obligation to employ it for this purpose, and seriously weigh what I have now said : for it contains truths of the most interesting and important nature."

10. And the disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou to them in parables ?

That is, Thou teachest us many things plainly, when we are by ourselves ; but before the multitude thou speakest in parables, which, because the moral is not added, have something in them perplexed, and difficult to be understood. This part of our Saviour's conduct has been made a serious objection to his religion : for it has been said that the Christian law is delivered in fables : whereas a rule of conduct ought to be expressed in the plainest language. This charge, however, is not well founded. The rules of a good life, and of our faith and hope, Christ had delivered before in the plainest words ; as appears from chapters v. vi. and vii. of this evangelist, as well as from the other books of the New Testament. These are the parts of Scripture which have properly the force of laws : the things which Christ explains by fables are of another kind, which he calls the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, in which he partly unfolds the nature of the divine dispensations, but principally foretels the reception which the gospel would meet with from different persons, and the progress that it would make among Jews and Gentiles. For the purposes of prophecy, it is acknowledged, on all hands, that some obscurity of language is requisite.

11. He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven ; but to them it is not given.

By *mysteries*, when mentioned in the New Testament, we are to understand not things apparently contradictory, or, in their own nature incomprehensible ; but things not before revealed, and which are now made manifest. The mysteries here intended seem to be the influence of the gospel upon different persons, and the success of it in the world. The knowledge of these facts, Christ says to his disciples, is given to you : " To you, children, who have received, with the most humble and teachable disposition of mind, the precepts I proposed to you in the plainest words, this favour is given of my Father ; but to them who appear to themselves wise and intelligent, and who so fastidiously reject those precepts which lead to humility and meekness, which are the elements of true piety, to them it is not given." While there were many such persons in the crowd, this was a sufficient reason why those things which were indeed useful, but not necessary to salvation, should be proposed more obscurely : if there were any who were desirous of understanding them, they might privately have access to Christ in the absence of the crowd, and ask an explanation of those things which they could not otherwise learn.

12. For whosoever hath, *hath much*, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance ; but

whosoever hath not, *hath but little*, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

For the propriety of this kind of treatment, Christ appeals to a common proverbial expression, the meaning of which is, that to those who make a proper use of what they have received from us, we are ready to grant additional favours ; but from those who are ungrateful, or who do not use the things which are given them, we are accustomed to take away what is given. On the same principle, those Jews who were readily disposed to attend to his doctrine, should be more fully informed about it : whereas careless and inattentive hearers should have no benefit from his instruction.

“ That the word *hath* signifies *hath much*, is evident from what follows, “ to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance ;” in which it is implied that he had an abundance before : so, *hath not* signifies *hath but very little*.”*

13. Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they, seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand.

I speak to them in parables, because their stupidity is so gross and their prejudices so numerous, that though they have capacities proper for understanding and receiving my doctrine, yet they will neither understand nor receive it, if I speak in the plainest terms.

14. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, “ *ye will hear with your ears*,” and not understand ; and seeing ye shall see, “ *and ye will see with your eyes*,” and shall not, “ *will not*,” perceive.

15. For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

These verses give a description of the people of the Jews, as they were in the days of the prophet ; but it appears from Isaiah, that they are rightly applied by our Lord to the Jews of his own time : for when the prophet asks how long they would maintain this character, it is answered by God, “ until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate ;” that is, till the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the commonwealth, by the Romans.

16. But blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear.

I speak to the multitude in parables, because their wickedness

* Bishop Pearce in loc.

renders them incapable of receiving my doctrine ; but happy are ye, whose humble and teachable dispositions fit you for being made acquainted with every thing relating to the kingdom of heaven. That the eyes and ears are here put, figuratively, for the mind, is evident: for it is in that sense that Christ uses the terms in the preceding verses.

17. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets, "*many teachers*," and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

He proceeds to tell them why they ought to esteem themselves happy, namely, because they were honoured with peculiar favour from God, and because this honour had not been conferred on many other teachers and holy men ; the honour of knowing so many of the secrets of the divine dispensations, which God had reserved for the times of the Messiah. He might also intend to check the vanity of his disciples, who might be disposed to think too highly of themselves, when they found that that revelation which had been denied to the Jews, on account of their wickedness, was communicated to them for the sake of their virtues. He anticipates this error, and guards against it by reminding them of the excellent character of some of those from whom this favour was withholden : " Truly you are not better than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets, to whom this happiness was not granted : that it is denied to the other Jews, is an act of justice ; that the favour is conferred upon you, is not owing wholly to your merit, but to the wisdom of the divine counsels, which chose to reserve it for these last days."

18. Hear ye, therefore, the parable of the sower.

19. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, "*the evil one*," and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed, "*this is what was sown*," by the way-side.

20. But that which was sown in rocky places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon, "*immediately*," with joy receiveth it :

21. Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while ; but when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

22. And that which was sown among thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

23. But that which was sown on the good ground, is he that heareth the word and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty.

Having already applied this explanation to the parable, it is unnecessary for me to make any further observation.

REFLECTIONS.

1. How happy may we esteem ourselves, and how thankful should we be to God, that we are favoured with a complete knowledge of the Christian revelation, and of the designs of Providence respecting its future progress ! It must have afforded no small joy and consolation to the disciples of Christ, to learn that their religion, which was then confined to so few persons, and most violently opposed, should triumph over all opposition, and be diffused throughout every part of the known world. Still more satisfaction must it have yielded them, to be informed of the happy consequences which it would produce upon the tempers of individuals, by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness a hundred-fold. It is no less satisfactory to us in the present day, to be persuaded that the soil is still equally good, and that the seed sown will be equally productive. For this knowledge let us be thankful to God who admits us into his secret counsels, and treats us more like friends and equals than like the subjects of his government. This favour has been denied to others ; not only to blind and prejudiced Jews, but to men of the most excellent characters in former ages ; many of them far better than ourselves ; a proof that our receiving it does not arise from our peculiar merit, but from the wisdom of the divine counsel, which chose to reserve such discoveries for us of this distant age and country. Yet the value of the favour is enhanced rather than diminished hereby ; as it appears to proceed from the unmerited bounty and grace of the Almighty.

2. The parable of the sower furnishes useful instruction to those who dispense the gospel, and an important warning to those who hear it. The ministers of religion must not be surprised if their instructions are sometimes wholly lost ; being communicated to men whose minds are completely hardened against all religious impressions, like the beaten path which will not permit the seed to enter, and who suffer it to be carried entirely from their memories by intercourse with the world, and by the common occurrences of life. Of those upon whom it produces some effect, they must expect that many who receive it with joy, and enter upon the right way with alacrity, will soon be discouraged by the difficulties which they meet with in their journey, and turn back ; and that others, who promised fair to produce abundant fruit, will frustrate their hopes, through the cares of the world and love of riches. There are but a few of those upon whom the seed is sown, and upon whom

they bestow their labours, that will bear fruit to perfection. When that which is lost upon the high-way, upon rocky places, and upon thorny ground, is taken into the account, there is but a small portion left for the good soil. Let them not, however, be discouraged: the produce of that little is abundant, and may justly be considered as making them amends for the want of a return in other instances.

Let those who hear the gospel learn hence the danger to which they are exposed. Their good resolutions may wither and die, blasted by the pestilential breath of persecution, as the tender herb dies by the nipping frost, or the heat of the mid-day sun: or the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, may choke the word, and render it unfruitful. Guard yourselves against such enemies; never remit your exertions to preserve true religion in your minds, and depend not too much upon occasional good impressions which you have received, or good resolutions which you have formed: they are but the first beginnings of goodness, which may be easily destroyed, like the rising corn.

3. How deplorable was the condition of the Jews, as here described by our Saviour! They were furnished with understandings for knowing the truth, and they were capable of attaining great excellence by an acquaintance with it; but their prejudices and vices had darkened their understandings, and rendered them incapable of discerning the evidence of the Christian religion. To attempt to instruct them, was as hopeless an employment as endeavouring to teach the blind to see, or the deaf to hear. Justly were such men deprived of further knowledge, when they neglected to improve what they had; justly were they deprived of that common prudence which is necessary to preserve nations from utter ruin, when they had rejected that divine knowledge which came from heaven by Christ. Let us take care that as we resemble them in our privileges, we do not also resemble them in an obstinate rejection of the truth, and in the punishments which were inflicted for this crime. For this purpose let us take heed how we hear.

SECTION XXXI.

The parable of the tares, of the grain of mustard seed, and of the leaven.

MATTHEW xiii. 24—43.

24. ANOTHER parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened, "*is like*" unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.

The preaching of the gospel is like a man sowing good seed in his field. The field, as we learn from the explanation which Christ

gives of this parable, was intended to represent the world, which conveyed an intimation to the disciples that the preaching of the gospel was not to be confined to Judæa, but was to be extended to every country under heaven. The person who sowed is Jesus Christ, or, as he here styles himself, in order to express his own ideas of his mean condition, notwithstanding the high honours conferred upon him by this important office, the Son of man. The good seed was intended to represent good men : they are also called by Christ the children of the kingdom, because they are the proper subjects of that spiritual kingdom which God established among men ; the chief design of which was to make men good.

25. But while men slept, “ *during the time of sleep,*” his enemy came and sowed tares, “ *weeds,*” among his wheat, and went his way.

The English word *tares* does not exactly correspond with the meaning of the word used in the original : for by it is evidently intended some useless, noxious weed, which men burn in the fire : whereas tares are an useful kind of pulse. These weeds are wicked persons, who assume the name of Christians, and join themselves to them. These professors of religion are so like good men, that like weeds among the wheat, they cannot be distinguished from them. The enemy that sowed them is the devil : he is the adversary of Christ, and constantly endeavours to counteract his benevolent designs, being an enemy to all goodness. Wicked men who mix themselves with the good, are called his children, not merely because they resemble him in their temper and dispositions, but because he is the professed patron of all wickedness.

26. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the weeds also.

When the wheat first appeared on the surface of the ground, it could not be distinguished from the weeds which were mixed with it ; but when it grew up to the ear, it then appeared to be of quite a different species. Thus also wicked men associate themselves with the good, and cannot be distinguished from them for some time ; yet something occurs, before it be long, to betray their character.

27. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field ? from whence then hath it these weeds ?

28. He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up ?

In the conduct of these servants, we see a just representation of the officious zeal of some Christians, who, from a mistaken regard for the honour of their master and the purity of his religion, are ready, without being called upon, to exterminate from the world all those whom they deem to be corrupt members of the church. In doing this they imagine that they are accomplishing his wishes,

and defeating the designs of his enemies ; but he disapproves and condemns such measures, as totally opposite to those rules of mercy and forbearance which he has laid down to himself, for the government of the church.

29. But he said, Nay ; lest while ye gather up the weeds, ye root up also the wheat with them.

To remove wicked men from the church, might appear to be removing a common ground of reproach, which its enemies are fond of employing as an argument against the purity and excellence of its principles, and to be effectually cutting off the source of further corruption : but as even good men are liable to be deceived in the judgment which they form of the characters of mankind, it is possible that they might regard as the enemies of Christ, those who are his best friends, and, under the idea of destroying weeds, root up much good wheat. The history of the Christian church abundantly confirms the truth of this supposition. It would on this account, be dangerous to entrust fallible men with this authority ; but this is not the only evil that would arise thence, nor the reason here given for withholding it : for wicked men are so closely connected with the good in the present world, by the bands of nature and the common intercourse of life, that to destroy the one would greatly injure, if not destroy, the other. From a regard, therefore, to the happiness of his own people, God forbids them to be separated. Other reasons may likewise be assigned for their continuing to live together, which, though not mentioned here, may easily be collected from other parts of Scripture. Among vicious men there are some who are capable of being reformed, and God patiently waits for their repentance. Such characters also serve to exercise the constancy and the benevolence of good men ; — their constancy, by teaching them not to suffer themselves to be drawn aside from the right way by corrupt examples ; and their benevolence, by leading them to endeavour, in every way in their power, to reclaim sinners from their vices. This prohibition against destroying wicked men must not be considered as forbidding Christians to disown those of their brethren who walk disorderly ; or the civil magistrates to execute the sentence of the laws enjoining death upon daring offenders. Yet it were well if both, in the exercise of their authority, paid a greater regard to the example of patience and forbearance set them by the Divine Being.

30. Let both grow together until the harvest ; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them ; but gather ye the wheat into my barn.

The harvest here mentioned is intended to represent the end of the world, till which time it is the will of God, that the righteous and the wicked continue together. At that time the Son of man will order his angels, here represented by reapers, to separate the wicked from the good, and command the former to be cast into a

place of torment, here expressed by being burnt, or cast into a furnace of fire ; the latter, to be taken into the kingdom of their Father.

31. Another parable put he forth unto them : The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field :

32. Which indeed is the least of all seeds ; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree : so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

By this and the following parable, our Lord represents the very small number of Jews who would believe in him, and the incredible multitudes who, by their aid, should be brought from the Gentiles to the knowledge of true religion. How widely the word of God spread in a short time, and what progress it made without the assistance of human power, and even in opposition to it, we learn from the book of Acts, and from the epistles of Paul. Since that time it has been still farther extended. Christ, therefore, compares his religion to a grain of mustard seed ; which is one of the smallest of seeds, so that to be small, like a grain of mustard seed, was a proverbial expression among the Jews ; but when it springs up, it becomes, in the country of Judæa, though not in our own, as large as a tree, so that the birds of the air roost in the branches of it. In mentioning this last circumstance, our Lord seems to allude to the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which was intended to represent his vast kingdom. Like such a tree, springing from a small seed, would be his religion.

33. Another parable spake he unto them : The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid, "*mixed.*" in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.

By this parable our Lord intimates that his religion, although small and insignificant in its beginning, would be diffused throughout the world : for he compares it to leaven, which leavens the whole mass. The reason why three measures of meal are mentioned, is that this was the quantity of meal used at a time for making bread.

34. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables ; and without a parable spake he not unto them :

35. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables : I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

These words are taken from the 78th Psalm ; but are by no means to be considered as a prophecy relating to Jesus Christ, or

the manner in which he should teach. The evangelist Matthew, finding that they were fitted to express his ideas of that method of instruction which Jesus had adopted, employs them for this purpose, and applies to him what Asaph had before applied to himself. Hence we learn that the design of the Messiah's kingdom, and the extent of it, had been kept a secret, unknown to men of former ages, from the beginning of the world.

36. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house ; and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the weeds of the field.

37. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.

38. The field is the world : the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the weeds are the children of the wicked one.

39. The enemy that sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world ; and the reapers are the angels.

40. As, therefore, the weeds are gathered and burnt in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world.

41. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.

By things that offend are meant, all things which lead men to forsake the profession of Christianity, an effect which the wicked lives of Christians are likely to produce. The persons reserved for the fire are those that do iniquity, men of immoral lives, and not of harmless erroneous opinions, as some have imagined.

42. And shall cast them into a furnace of fire ; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

There shall be the most excruciating agony, such as men express by the most violent symptoms.

43. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

That is, Then when they are purified from the society of wicked men. These words seem to be borrowed from Daniel, who, speaking of the resurrection of the dead, says, " Then shall they that be wise shine forth as the brightness of the firmament ; and they that have turned many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

Who hath ears to hear let him hear.

REFLECTIONS.

1. How painful is it to reflect that the design of the first of these parables has been so little attended to by Christians ; and that such unspeakable mischiefs have hence arisen to the world ! The followers of Jesus have acted upon principles directly opposite to those of patience and forbearance, which God prescribes to himself in regard to the wicked, and which he wishes us to follow. Wherever they have discovered sentiments on religious subjects different from their own, they have not hesitated to pronounce those who maintained them, vicious and abandoned, the children of the wicked one ; and have proceeded to treat them with the same violence with which the servant of the householder proposed to treat the weeds—to root them out of the world. In performing this work, they have imagined that the more pain they could inflict upon the unhappy sufferer, or his connexions, the greater abhorrence they expressed of his dangerous principles, and the more acceptable their services to the Divine Being. Foolish and infatuated men ! to imagine that the Father of mankind could be pleased to see his children destroyed ; and that acts of cruelty could be acceptable to that Being whose first prerogative is mercy.

2. The principle upon which the servants of the householder are forbidden to pluck up the weeds, lest they should, at the same time, root up the wheat, shows us the injustice of wars as they have been most commonly conducted. When undertaken by nations, not to defend their liberties and independence, but to revenge injuries committed by individuals, they destroy the innocent with the guilty, root up the wheat with the weeds, and become acts of injustice and inhumanity. Blessed be those nations who shall renounce, in their practice as well as in their principles, all wars of revenge and punishment : they will prevent the shedding of much innocent blood ; they will greatly diminish the sum of human misery, and imitate the noble example of patience and forbearance which is given us by God, who suffers the guilty to go unpunished, rather than injure the innocent.

3. Let not wicked men flatter themselves that because they are treated with so much lenity in the present world, they shall escape punishment in the next. They now associate themselves with the good, and enjoy the same benefits and privileges with them : hence they may be led to imagine that they shall always receive the like favour ; but let them not trust to these appearances. They are now suffered to go unpunished, and to partake of the bounties of Providence, in common with the servants of God, from motives of tenderness to them, and of compassion to those with whom they are connected : but the season of separation is approaching, and, when that event has taken place, they may be treated with the severity which their crimes deserve, without injury to the innocent. This is the period which they ought to fear : for it is no light evil which they will then have to endure ; but a dreadful furnace of

fire, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. O gather not my soul with the wicked, but let me be bound up in the bundle of life !*

4. Let not those who have a just cause to support, be discouraged by the smallness of their numbers. In the case of the Christian religion, you see what great effects have followed from small beginnings : how the grain of mustard seed has arisen to a large and spreading tree. Your cause, if it be protected and favoured by Providence, as every good cause must be, will do the same. It may have but few advocates at present, and it may lie under great discouragements : but the number of its friends shall increase, till it at length triumphs over all opposition. Desert not then a cause which is favoured by heaven, and which will one day be successful.

SECTION XXXII.

*Comparison of the kingdom of heaven to hidden treasure ;
to a pearl of great price ; to a net cast into the sea.
Christ returns to Nazareth.*

MATTHEW xiii. 44—58.

44. AGAIN, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, “ *to hidden treasure in a field ;*” the which when a man hath found, he hideth, “ *keepeth secret,*” and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

By this and the following parable, our Lord represents the great value of the gospel, and the wisdom of parting with all that we have, in order to secure its blessings. No moral is given to them, because the design of them was sufficiently evident to the disciples, from those which he had explained before. It is not a treasure of money which seems to be here intended, but of rich earth, or profitable ore, which the man could not get at without turning up the soil : he therefore bought the field. For this purpose he is represented as selling all that he hath ; to teach us that the love of glory, of riches, and of pleasure, is to be renounced, and if there be occasion, every thing else that is valuable in life abandoned, in order to preserve an interest in the promises of the gospel. The conduct of the man who makes such sacrifices is wise and just, and worthy of our imitation. The character of this man seems to be here mentioned by way of opposition to that described before, in verse 21 ; “ who hath not root in himself ; but dureth for a while : for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”

* 1 Sam. xxv. 29.

45. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls :

46. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

As he is said to have found a treasure who has obtained some great good, so a thing of great price, such as the gospel, is justly compared to a pearl. In the use of this comparison, our Lord alludes to a well-known maxim among the Jews, that wisdom is to be preferred to silver, and gold, and rubies, which is frequently expressed in the proverbs of Solomon. The same thing was intended by both these parables, the inestimable value of the gospel ; but there is some difference in the representation of the manner in which it is obtained. The hidden treasure in the field seems to have been found by one who did not look for it ; but the merchantman who found the pearl was searching for such precious substances : so the evangelical doctrine shone upon some who never thought anything concerning it, or of the hope of another life, or of reforming their lives. This was the case with many in foreign countries, to whom that prophecy which Paul mentions, is applicable ; “ I was found of those who sought me not ;” but there were others who cultivated the study of wisdom, both among the Jews and in other countries ; who had an earnest desire of knowing the truth, and who looked for some great prophet, or even for the Messiah himself, with eager expectation. The case of the former is represented by the treasure that was found in the field ; that of the others, by the pearl that was found by one who was searching for pearls.

47. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind :

The net which was here intended was a drag-net, which incloses every thing ; small fish, which fishermen throw away and do not think worth keeping, as well as those which are large.

48. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels ; but cast the bad away.

49. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,

50. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

The two last verses contain the moral of the parable, by which it appears that the design of it is the same with that of the weeds or tares, and good grain, and that they are both intended to represent that professing Christians would have bad men as well as good among them, and that they would continue with them until the end

of the world, or the day of judgment, when God would separate them from the just, and send them into a place of punishment.

51. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things ? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

The explanation which he had given of some of the parables, had enabled them to understand the rest, to which he had given no moral.

52. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Scribes were, properly speaking, the secretaries or assistants of the magistrate ; but because the same persons were also teachers of the law, scribes and lawyers came to signify the same thing, and are used promiscuously. As it was customary with Christ to express by names familiar among the Jews, the gifts and offices which were to exist in the Christian church ; by the use of the word *scribes* here, he intends teachers of the Christian religion. Of such persons he declares that, if they are well prepared for teaching Christianity, they will study to illustrate and recommend its doctrines and precepts with some degree of variety, such as Christ had here used : like the master of a house who lays before his guests various kinds of food ; such as has been long kept, and such as will not keep. By new and old, however, some understand the New and Old Testament ; as if Christ meant to intimate that the teachers of Christianity would draw the rules of life not merely from the Old Testament, but likewise from what they heard of him.

53. And it came to pass that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

54. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogues ; insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works ?

By his own country, there is no doubt that Nazareth is to be understood : hence he was called Jesus of Nazareth. His townsmen were astonished at the knowledge which he discovered, and at his power of performing miracles, which they could not believe were bestowed upon him by God.

55. Is not this the carpenter's son ? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas ?

It appears hence that Joseph, the father of Christ, was a carpenter ; and as there prevailed a laudable custom among the Jews at that time, that the sons of persons even of ample fortune should be taught some handicraft business ; it is probable that Christ worked

at the business of a carpenter with his father. This circumstance ought not to have offended the Jews, several of whose prophets were called to their office from the meanest condition ; David himself, from keeping of sheep ; Elisha, from following the plough ; and Amos, from tending the herds.

56. And his sisters, are they not all with us ? or, “ *like us,*” *persons of the same condition and education as ourselves.* Whence then hath this man all these things ?

57. And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house.

Those who are here called his brothers and his sisters, are supposed by some to be his cousins, as it was usual at this time to apply those terms to remote relations ; but, whether we regard them as one or the other, it appears that they were poor : for the inhabitants of Nazareth were offended with this circumstance. They ask, “ whence hath he all these things ?” since he was neither absent before from Nazareth, nor could he learn those things from his own friends, none of whom were better acquainted with letters than the common people. What Christ repeats to them concerning a prophet, was a famous adage among the Jews, which he applies to his own reception ; the meaning of which is that good men, especially prophets, are never more despised than among their own people.

58. And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

Paul has observed, concerning the gift of tongues, (1 Cor. xiv. 22,) that it was given that it might be a sign not to those who believe, but to the unbelieving. It is to be observed here, therefore, that it is not said that Christ did no miracles at Nazareth, but that he did not many : for Christ performed miracles every where, that those who knew nothing concerning him might believe in him. For those who began to believe in him he wrought others, by which they might be established in the faith which was begun. To those who despised the first he did not add more, lest the divine liberality should become common. Thus God by turns enjoins duties and confers benefits.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From the parables of the pearl and of the hidden treasure in the field, let us learn to set the highest value upon the gospel of Christ : it furnishes us with what creatures in our circumstances stood most in need of, delivering us from the power of sinful habits, washing away the guilt of past sins, restoring peace to the troubled conscience, affording us a rule by observing which, we may spend

a life of innocence, virtue, and happiness for the time to come, and secure the favour of Almighty God. It fortifies our minds for supporting the heaviest afflictions of the present state, and shows us the way, and ensures us a title, to an immortal life of unspeakable happiness beyond the grave. Such a treasure is justly to be valued above every other good : let nothing induce us to part with this prize : let us be thankful to God who has put it in our way, unsought for and unasked, and has taught us to form a just estimate of its worth. We shall see particular propriety in this, if we reflect how insensible the generality of mankind are to its value : they know not the riches contained in this treasure, nor their own happiness in possessing it : they are ready to give up their interest in the blessings which it contains, for gold, for worldly honour, or power, or for the gratification of any passion which will afford them the smallest pleasure.

2. Let not those whose situation in life obliges them to submit to manual labour, be discontented with their condition : all useful labour is honourable to him who is employed in it ; and that in which they are engaged is the most necessary and important branch of human industry. The rich and affluent are indebted to the labouring part of mankind for their ease, and for all their enjoyments : they are the strength and the sinews of the state : they are to the political what the hands are to the natural body, the means of support and defence. If these considerations will not reconcile them to their condition, by convincing them that it is truly honourable, let them recollect that it was the situation in which their Lord and Master was placed, before he was called to his public ministry : he was the son of Joseph the carpenter ; and we have great reason to believe that he assisted him in that occupation. Let no one think himself dishonoured by a situation in life to which the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, the greatest prophet and most excellent character who ever appeared in the world, submitted. For it is enough for the disciple if he be as his master, and the servant, as his lord : if he discharge the duties of his station with diligence, and be contented with his lot, he will one day stand in higher rank among the servants of God than many of those who treat him now with contempt.

3. From the prejudices entertained against Christ by the inhabitants of Nazareth, let the ministers of religion learn that they ought not to be surprised if they meet with the like obstacles, in the exercise of their office. They could not believe that he was a prophet, and was honoured with divine communications of wisdom and power, because his parents and relations were poor : and they had seen nothing extraordinary in the former part of his life : but these circumstances, if they had properly considered them, would have afforded them satisfactory proof of his divine mission : for if his education and situation in life could not furnish him with the means of superior information, the extraordinary knowledge which he now discovered was so much more evidently of divine origin. In proportion as they were satisfied that it could not come from man, they might be assured that it was derived from God :

but envy at the reputation of one whom they had once considered as their equal, perhaps their inferior, blinded their eyes, and prevented them from perceiving the light of evidence.

If Christ, then, was rejected by his townsmen for these reasons, we must not be surprised if others are opposed from the same weak and unreasonable prejudices. While human nature continues to be the same, we must still expect that those from whom we seemed to have most reason to look for a ready reception of the truth, will frequently be the most zealous and violent in opposing it.

SECTION XXXIII.

John the Baptist beheaded by Herod.

MATTHEW xiv. 1—13.

1. AT that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus,

The word *tetrarch* signifies the governor of a fourth part of a country or state. This appellation was given to Herod, because the dominions of his father, Herod the Great, were divided, at his death, into four parts, among so many sons ; one of which parts fell to the share of this prince.

2. And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist : he is risen, “ *he has been raised,*” from the dead ; and, therefore, mighty works do show forth themselves in him ; “ *are wrought by him.*”

Some would translate these words in the form of a question : “ Is this John the Baptist ? Hath he been raised from the dead ?” which seems better to correspond with what Luke says, who represents Herod as perplexed, or doubting whether he were John, which his guilty fears, however, inclined him to think probable : “ John have I beheaded ; but who is this of whom I hear such things ?” Herod, who was a Jew, would find less difficulty in believing that John might be raised to life after he had been put to death, when he found examples in the Jewish history of persons raised to life by Elijah and Elisha. The suspicion of Herod was probably confirmed, when he heard that the preaching of Jesus and of John resembled each other ; both relating to repentance and the kingdom of heaven. The image of this holy man, unjustly put to death by him, haunted his imagination night and day ; and his fears would magnify the smallest resemblance into ample proof. He supposes that John might now be endowed with these miraculous powers, in order to prove his innocence, and to point out the heinousness of the crime of putting him to death.

3. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound

him, and put him in prison, for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.

4. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.

When it was that John said this to Herod, we are not told : it is not likely that he condemned this marriage while preaching to the people in the wilderness ; for that might have been imputed to him as sedition, and exciting the people against their prince ; nor is it likely that he inveighed against it, without being invited to speak ; but as we are told by the evangelist Mark that Herod heard him gladly, and did many things, it is probable that he sent for John, in order to hear so distinguished a person preach, and that it was upon this occasion that John took an opportunity to condemn the marriage. In this connexion with Herodias, Herod was guilty of a double transgression of the law : for to take away the wife of any person, while he was living, and without his consent, was adultery ; a crime which, in the present case was rendered by so much the more heinous, as it was committed against a brother. To this adultery the crime of incest was likewise added : for the law of Moses (Lev. xviii. 16,) prohibited an Israelite from marrying a brother's wife, except when he died leaving no children, which did not at all excuse the present deed : for Philip, if he were dead, had a daughter, who is mentioned in this history.

5. And when he would have put him to death, "*wished to put him to death,*" he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.

Herod, being continually solicited by Herodias, was willing to gratify her ; but he feared the resentment of the people, who regarded John as a prophet, or a teacher by divine appointment.

6. But when Herod's birth-day was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.

As it was not usual for women to appear at public banquets, this act of condescension in the daughter of Herodias added to the impression made upon him by her fine dancing.

7. Whereupon, he promised with an oath to give her whatever she would ask.

Mark tells us that he added "even to the half of my kingdom," which was a common promise with princes, when they wished to express their liberality.

8. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger, "*in a dish.*"

She was instructed of her mother before she made the above request, but not before she came in to dance : for Mark tells us that she went out, to consult with her mother what she should ask.

It was usual with princes, when they gave orders for the execution of a criminal, to have his head brought to them, that they might be satisfied the order was executed. This the damsel requested might be done upon the present occasion.

9. And the king was sorry ; nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them that sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

He was sorry, not so much for having promised to put an innocent man to death, as because of the danger which he apprehended from the indignation of the people in consequence of that event. Two considerations, however, determined the tetrarch, who is here called a king, to do that which he was before inclined to do. The first was the promise which he had made, and sanctioned with repeated oaths ; as if an oath would authorize him to do that which was in itself unlawful. His crime consisted in making the oath ; to fulfil it was to commit another crime. It is possible too, that he might be ashamed of appearing to fear the common people, in the presence of his captains and chief officers, by breaking a solemn promise. The other consideration was the gratification of his guests, who, in order to please Herodias, after the manner of courtiers, urged him to comply with her request. These were the circumstances which, in his apprehension, gave some colour of propriety to this flagrant act of injustice and inhumanity.

10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.

11. And his head was brought in a dish, and given to the damsel ; and she brought it to her mother.

She did this that her mother might be satisfied that her wish had been executed, and might enjoy the malicious pleasure of beholding the head of her enemy.

12. And his disciples came and took up the body ; and buried it ; and went and told Jesus.

13. When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence, by ship, into a desert place apart ; and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot, "*by land,*" out of the cities : *for many were infirm and not able to walk.*

It was not when Jesus heard of the death of John that he departed thence : for that was an event which had happened long before this time ; and the whole of this story is to be considered as a digression and included in a parenthesis ; but when he heard what was said of him in the court of Herod, he withdrew out of his dominions, that he might be out of his reach.

REFLECTIONS.

THIS short story contains much useful instruction.

1. The integrity and courage of John the Baptist, in reproving Herod for his crimes, give us a high opinion of his character, and are well worthy of imitation. By over-looking or extenuating this fault in the conduct of the king, he might still have enjoyed his favour, and perhaps have obtained preferment at his court; but John was more concerned about discharging his duty than promoting his own private interests. He thought that he ought not to neglect a favourable opportunity of doing good, by endeavouring to reclaim from his vices a man whose example had such an extensive influence: he ventured to perform the office of true friendship, by labouring to deliver a friend (for such Herod had once shown himself) from the guilt of sin. For this act of fidelity and disinterested benevolence, he is rewarded, first with imprisonment, and afterwards with death. We may lament his want of success, and perhaps be ready to condemn his presumption, in imagining that a great prince would listen to the reproofs of an individual; but his life, which was lost by this means, was not an useless sacrifice; his conduct afforded to the world an unquestionable and striking proof of his integrity, and hereby confirmed the truth of all his former declarations. The testimony of John to his own divine mission, and to that of his superior and master, received almost as much support from the manner of his death as it would have done from miracles. Let the ministers of religion learn to imitate the example of John, by reproving, rebuking, and exhorting all within the reach of their influence, whatever their rank or condition may be. To court the favour of the great, by flattering their vices, and extenuating their faults, would be to betray a sacred trust, and degrade their characters; and although, by integrity and plainness, they may rather provoke resentment than produce reformation, yet their conduct shall not go without a reward. The evils and losses which they may sustain from men shall be more than compensated by the favour of God, and the happiness of a future life.

2. In the fears and suspicions of Herod, we see the power of conscience to make men, in the most exalted condition, miserable. He had put John to death, and hereby delivered himself, as he imagined, from the most dangerous foe to his peace. There was no longer any voice to reproach him for his incestuous connexion: and he hoped to enjoy the fruits of his crime without molestation: but there was an enemy, which he had stirred up within his own bosom, which he could not so easily subdue: it continually represented to him the enormous nature of his wickedness, in putting to death an innocent and excellent man: it warned him to prepare for some signal punishment, which divine justice would inflict upon his guilty head. In this state of his mind, he gives easy credit to an improbable report which prevailed among the multitude, that the person whom he had unjustly destroyed was raised from the dead, and was coming to expose his murderer to public shame.

Let us beware, my brethren, that we do not provoke conscience to be our enemy, by opposing its dictates. From the moment when we do this we may date the loss of our tranquillity : no condition, however exalted, no pleasures, however great and long continued, will save us from the reproaches of our own minds, or render us easy and contented.

3. Let us learn from the dreadful example of Herod, to take care that we do not make light of oaths. They are solemn appeals to heaven for the truth of what we assert, and an imprecation of the divine vengeance upon ourselves ; or, which is the same thing, relinquishing the divine favour, if we are guilty of falsehood. To use such declarations upon light occasions, without thought or reflection, must necessarily involve us in the guilt of perjury. He that swears often in a discourse, must often swear falsely, and either expose himself to the shame of acknowledging that he has done so, or, by endeavouring to avoid it, be guilty of a double crime, as Herod was. Let us learn to reverence an oath, and never to use it but when the interests of society require it. With respect to all other oaths, we ought to keep in mind the words of our Lord, ‘Swear not at all.’

4. The occasion on which Herod was guilty of this rash oath, and of the consequences which followed from it, may teach us caution. It was at a public entertainment, when his spirits were exhilarated with company, and his understanding probably disordered with wine. It is at such times that men still say and do things which, in the moments of sober reflection, they see reason to be ashamed of: it is then they make declarations or enter into engagements, which they have occasion to lament as long as they live. Happy is the man who can guard himself against every degree of intemperance, and who, in the most cheerful moments of life, never goes beyond the bounds of truth and duty : he saves himself from much painful regret, and he preserves the tranquillity of his mind undisturbed.

5. The conduct of Herodias may teach us the blindness and savage nature of malice. Herod, in a transport of delight, promised to bestow upon her daughter whatever she should ask : and no doubt she might have obtained for her child great wealth or great honour ; but she sacrifices her ambition and love of riches to her resentment, and desires that she may have in a dish, the head of John the Baptist : a horrid and useless present to any one else, but highly acceptable to her, because it gratified her hatred, which she had indulged so long, that it had destroyed all the tenderness of female nature, and transformed her into a fiend taking pleasure in the sight of human blood.

SECTION XXXIV.

Christ feeds the multitude, and walks upon the sea.

MATTHEW xiv. 14—36.

14. AND Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them ; and he healed their sick.

He had retreated to this desert place for the sake of retirement and rest : but the benevolence of his temper would not allow him to behold human creatures afflicted with disease, without giving them his assistance.

15. And when it was evening, “ *the evening coming on,*” his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past : send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

By “the time,” is meant the time of making the chief meal in that country, which was called supper, and eaten after the heat of the day began to abate.

16. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart : give ye them to eat.

17. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves and two fishes.

18. He said, Bring them hither to me.

19. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves and two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

It was usual with the Jews, before they ate bread, to thank or bless God for bestowing it upon them : this custom Christ approved, and adopted in his own practice. This was called *a blessing* among them, because the form of thanksgiving began with the words “blessed be God :” with us it is called *a grace*, because the first word of this form in Latin was *gratias*.

20. And they did all eat, and were filled ; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets-full.

21. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men ; beside women and children.

As so great a multitude of persons ate of the bread and were satisfied, and the fragments that were left, being twelve baskets-full, were more than the original quantity, which was but five loaves ; it appears that there must have been a creation of bread upon this occasion, which, although a wonderful miracle, is mentioned by the evangelist with that simplicity which always accompanies truth, without any mark of admiration. There were, however, other miracles of a similar nature performed by the ancient prophets ; as in the case of the widow's barrel of meal, which continued to be used by her and the prophet Elijah without wasting ; and, likewise, that of the twenty barley loaves, which, by the order of Elisha, were placed before a hundred men ; and by being miraculously increased, were sufficient to satisfy them and to leave something : but that which Christ now performed, in feeding five thousand men, beside women and children, with five loaves and a few fishes, was of much greater magnitude than either of the former. We are not to be surprised at the effect in either case, when we consider that it was performed by the power of God, for which nothing is too hard. Although they were now in a desert place, they were furnished with so many baskets for receiving the fragments, because each of the twelve disciples used to follow Christ with a basket, in order to carry bread with them. The evangelist Mark tells us that the multitude were made to sit down in companies, by hundreds and fifties, which would make it an easy thing to know the whole number of those that were fed.

22. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples, *by persuasion*, to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side ; *not directly across, but further northward, towards the country of Genesaret*, while he sent the multitude away.

23. And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart, to pray ; and when the evening was come he was there alone ; *“ and was there in the evening alone.”*

As it was said to be evening before the men sat down to eat bread, it appears that the Jews had two periods which they called by that name ; one of which commenced at three o'clock in the afternoon ; the other, when the sun set ; it is this latter which is here spoken of.

24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves : for the wind was contrary.

25. And in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

The Romans, who were now in possession of Judæa, had introduced among the Jews the practice of dividing the night into four

watches, consisting of three hours each, and of beginning to reckon from six o'clock in the evening. The fourth watch, therefore, lasted from three to six in the morning : during this time it was, that Jesus came towards his disciples, walking upon the sea : all the preceding part of the night had been spent upon the mountain in prayer.

26. And when the disciples saw him walking upon the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit, "*an apparition,*" or "*phantom :*" and they cried out for fear.

This opinion that their Master walking upon the sea was a spectre or ghost, was probably derived from the Pharisees, who believed that the souls of men could exist separately from their bodies, and, surrounded with a light vehicle like a human shape, appear unto men. What created the terror of the disciples upon this occasion, was the apprehension that the spirits of wicked men chose rather to appear in the night than by day. That the body of a man could be supported by divine power upon the surface of the water, never entered into their thoughts.

27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer, "*take courage ;*" it is I ; be not afraid.

Christ corrects the mistake of his disciples, so far as regarded himself ; but says nothing to set them right in regard to the vulgar notion about ghosts and apparitions, which his disciples appear to have entertained : for the commission which he received was limited to teaching men religion, and did not extend to natural philosophy. On such subjects, his disciples were left to the exercise of their own faculties, and the influence of previous impressions. The popular opinion, therefore, derives no countenance from this passage, which only serves to show, what pain and terror may be occasioned by errors on subjects of philosophy or religion.

28. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the water.

Peter, struck with astonishment at the wonderful nature of the miracle, wished to make trial of it himself : being confident that he had faith enough for the purpose ; and our Lord, desirous to check his confidence, and convince him of his own weakness, encourages him to make the experiment.

29. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked upon the water to go to Jesus.

30. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid : and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ?

Peter had not proceeded far, before the agitation of the water made him doubt of the power of God to support his body upon the surface. His doubt caused the Divine Being to withdraw the miraculous agency by which he was before upholden : for it appears, by a variety of examples, that God refused to work miracles for or by those who questioned his ability to perform them. Christ here justly reproaches Peter with want of faith, when he had before his eyes so striking a proof of the divine power in the person of his Master.

32. And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

This was effected by the same miraculous power which supported Jesus upon the waves.

33. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

The appellation of Son of God was commonly given by the Jews to the Messiah ; hence Nathaniel says to him, " Rabbi, thou art the Son of God : thou art the king of Israel." This title seems to have been taken from the second Psalm, where, by the person called the Son of God, the Jews understood the Messiah. On this account also, where Matthew represents Peter as saying to Jesus, " thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Mark and Luke content themselves with saying, " thou art the Christ ;" the Son of God and Christ signifying the same thing. The extraordinary miracles which they had just observed, in the sudden ceasing of the wind, and the walking of Jesus upon the water, convinced even the sailors that he was the expected Messiah ; regarding him in this character, they felt a high reverence for him, and expressed it by prostrating themselves before him. In this humble posture it was usual for persons in the east to present themselves before kings and other great personages.

34. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Genesaret.

35. And when the men of the place had knowledge of him, "*knew him again,*" they sent into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased.

36. And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment ; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.

It was their faith in the divine power dwelling in Christ which wrought these cures ; which God permitted to take place upon their touching the remotest part of his clothes ; in order to show that it proceeded from him.

REFLECTIONS.

1. THE passage of Scripture which we have been reading furnishes us with more than one example of our Lord's piety : he would not taste of the bounties of Providence in an ordinary meal, without lifting up his eyes and heart to heaven, in grateful thanksgiving. In the same manner, let us thank God, when we take refreshment, for providing for men agreeable and wholesome food, and giving us liberty to use it ; not in a mere form of words, repeated without thought ; but accompanied with serious reflection, with lively gratitude, and sincere devotion. Let this example likewise teach us, that whenever we receive fresh benefits from the divine bounty, although of an ordinary kind, such as the refreshment and preservation of another night, protection and assistance in discharging the duties of another day, it becomes us to acknowledge the hand of God in these blessings. It is the more necessary to notice these favours in this manner, not merely because they are some of the most valuable mercies of life, but because they are common, and liable, on that account, to be forgotten, or attributed to second causes. Extraordinary and unusual favours, men are disposed, if they have any degree of gratitude, to acknowledge of themselves.

But such short and imperfect addresses to the Divine Being as these, offered up in the presence of men, could not satisfy our Lord : he must retire from the multitude, that he may have leisure for meditating upon the divine excellences, and more particularly upon the divine goodness, and pour forth the sentiments of a devout heart before heaven, without reserve and without interruption. This employment is so delightful to him that he can retire to a cold and solitary mountain to enjoy it, part with all the pleasures of society, and break in upon the hours of sleep and rest, at a time when oppressed with fatigue, and most in need of this refreshment. From his conduct let us learn that nothing is more agreeable to good minds than the exercises of devotion, and remember that neither public worship, nor the most active and laborious employments, will exempt us from the obligation to private prayer.

2. In the alarm which the disciples felt at the approach of their Master, we have an example of that misconstruction of events which is so common among Christians, and which is often the source of much unnecessary pain. The dispensations of Providence appear to be hostile and alarming in the highest degree : they see in them the certain cause of their ruin and misery : they deplore their wretched condition in being doomed to endure them, and cry out for fear. Yet what at first appeared to be an enemy, proves to be a friend in disguise, sent for the express purpose of

their deliverance or benefit. Let us not, therefore, be too hasty, in indulging our fears when evils threaten us, nor judge from the first appearance of things.

3. From the behaviour of Peter, let us learn to be diffident of our strength, and not heedlessly expose ourselves to danger. Such a temper of mind would probably subject us to disgrace ; as it did him, by bringing us into trials which we are not able to support. Those best consult their own safety and honour, who are distrustful of themselves, and careful to avoid trials.

4. The conduct of those who were in the ship, in acknowledging Jesus to be the Messiah, and in showing such reverence to him, was just and natural. Two miracles so extraordinary as walking on the sea and making the winds to cease, were a proof that he was no ordinary prophet, but that he must be commissioned to deliver some very important message to the world, that he therefore deserved high marks of respect and reverence from all who were about him. How inexcusable shall we be, if, after beholding not one or two miracles performed by him, but a great number, exhibited on a variety of occasions, we do not draw the same conclusion and act towards him in like manner ; if we do not acknowledge that he is the Son of God, and deserves from us at least as much homage as the greatest monarch in the world !

SECTION XXXV.

Christ rebukes the Pharisees for their innovations on the Law, and discourses concerning inward and outward purity.

MATTHEW xv. 1—20.

1. THEN came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,

2. Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders ? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

This was a private mission, despatched, to watch Jesus, from the metropolis, where the principal leaders of the party resided. The traditions of the elders were the maxims of men eminent for their learning or wisdom, to whom the Jews gave the title of Elders, in the same manner as it is usual to give the appellation of Fathers to those who are highly respected, and at the same time advanced in years. To these maxims the Pharisees paid the same regard as to the law itself, and in some instances, set them before it. By these teachers the Jews were enjoined to wash their hands before they sat down to an ordinary meal, not for cleanliness, but sanctity ; for their idea was that if a stranger, or a person on any account impure by the law, touched their victuals, or any vessel in

which they were dressed, the impurity was conveyed first to the body, and then to the mind. We perceive the symptoms of this Pharisaical notion among the disciples of Christ, when they so interpreted his caution respecting the leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees, as if he had forbidden them to take meat from either of those sects. The opinion of the necessity of washing the hands before meat derived some colour of propriety from the divine law which declared that the person, by touching certain bodies, contracts defilement, from which it could not be freed without certain purifications, to be performed by washing : yet the mind was not defiled by these impurities, except where a command of God had been neglected. The mistake of those who required this practice of purification consisted in this ; that they thought the touch of certain bodies was in itself impure, without any divine law to make it so, and that the minds of those persons who had been unknowingly exposed to it were affected with the impurity ; and lastly, that the defilement of the mind could be washed away by a rite which God had not commanded, but which they themselves had invented.

3. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God, by “*for,*” your tradition ?

Before Christ disputes with them the particular tradition which they objected to his disciples, he takes away the foundation upon which their reasoning rested : for they set it down as a certain and infallible maxim, that they were to abide by the opinions of their wise men, without any exception. That they did wrong in relying upon it, he shows by a most evident example, where the received opinion was directly contrary to the divine law.

4. For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother ; and he that curseth, “*revileth,*” father and mother, let him die the death ; “*let him be put to death.*”

That the precept of the fifth commandment, “honour thy father and mother,” included in it an honourable maintenance, by furnishing them with meat, drink, and clothing, was admitted by the most learned of the Hebrews : there was no occasion, therefore, why Christ should take pains to prove this point ; but he has very properly added the law delivered in another part of the books of Moses, which imposed the punishment of death upon the child who reviled his parents. See Exod. xxi. 17. For it would appear hence that the law which they had broken was not an insignificant or trifling one, but of such importance, in the estimation of God, that he thought proper to sanction it by capital punishment.

5. But ye say, “*teach,*” whosoever shall say unto his father or his mother, It is a gift, *i. e. to God,* by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me,

6. And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free.

The construction of this passage is difficult and obscure. Our translators are obliged to add words which are not in the original, in order to make out the sense. Bishop Pearce translates it thus ; “but ye teach *Be that by which I might profit thee a gift!* then he shall not honour his father or his mother ; and it may be thus paraphrased : “But your doctrine is, a man may say to his father, ‘The maintenance that I might have allowed you is an offering vowed to God,’ and thus evade the maintenance of his father and mother.”

The Jews sometimes solemnly devoted to God, that is, to the use of the public treasury in the temple, whatever they should give to any particular person ; meaning to put it out of their power to do any thing for them. This rash vow, when made in this particular manner, though it should respect a father or a mother, the Pharisees deemed to be lawful, and rigorously exacted it. It was common, also, to leave whole estates to the treasury after their deaths, and thereby deprive their descendants of their subsistence. This violation of the law the Pharisees might be more inclined to support, because part of the produce came to the priests, who were most of them of that sect ; and Luke tells us that they were covetous.

The word “honour” is here used for assisting and supporting. This is the meaning of “honouring widows who are widows indeed,” in Paul’s epistles. So also, when he says that an elder is worthy of double honour, it is synonymous to worthy of a double stipend.

Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect, for your tradition.

The Pharisees pretended to justify themselves upon this principle ; that precepts relating to God are to be preferred to those which relate to the advantage of men. In the former class they ranked vows and oaths ; in the other, all acts of beneficence ; but they ought to have remembered that vows and oaths are only methods by which we are bound ; and that we cannot be obliged by them to do that which was unlawful. The precept to observe oaths or vows supposes that what we promise is lawful and right to be done : if otherwise, it ceases to be of any force.

7. Ye hypocrites ! Well did Esaias prophecy of you, “*teach concerning you,*” *i. e. use words which are applicable to you,* (see *Isaiah xxix. 13,*) saying,

These words are only to be found in the Greek translation ; the Hebrew, and therefore the English, which is taken from it, is rather different.

8. This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips ; but their heart is far from me.

9. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men.

By commandments of men, or human commandments, both Isaiah and Christ mean not only those things which oppose the divine law, but such, likewise, as are required by human authority alone, without any divine injunction : such were some of the things about which he had been now treating.

10. But he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear and understand.

11. Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, (*provided it enter without any fault of his will ;*) but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

In Mark, this last clause is more general and intelligible : “ the things which proceed from out of the man,” that is, the things which proceed from his will, “ defile a man ;” but Christ, that the opposition between the two parts of the sentence might be more conspicuous, repeats the word *mouth*, although several of the vices which he afterwards mentions, are by no means the vices of the tongue. Christ does not here teach any thing contrary to the law, which made a distinction among meats ; yet, while he shows that nothing was naturally unclean, he prepares the way for the abrogation of it : for if what he asserts be true, the substance of those laws was in itself indifferent.

12. Then came his disciples and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying ?

That is, at what he had said about the tradition of the elders ; because the Pharisees set the highest value upon the traditions or opinions of wise men, and made the greatest part of divine worship consist in the observance of those traditions, and of certain rites which they had enjoined upon themselves.

13. But he answered, and said, Every plant, “ *every plantation,*” which my Heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

As if he had said, I am not concerned at their resentment : every addition which these men have made to the law of God it is my business to extirpate ; and it shall certainly be done.

14. Let them alone : they be blind leaders of the blind : and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch, “ *pit.*”

Regard not what they say or do against my doctrine, seeing they do it from the blindness of their minds. Let us, however, take care of the common people, who, in following such blind leaders, will run into destruction.

15. Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable, *the sentiment delivered in verse 11.*

16. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding ?

Ye, who ought long since to have learnt from me those things in which true piety consists ?

17. Do not ye understand that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught ? “ *into the sink.*”

Christ here explains how there can be no natural uncleanness in meat, which can penetrate to the mind. He supposes, what was deemed evident among the Jews, that the heart was the seat of the mind ; whence it would follow, that the uncleanness which cannot reach the heart cannot affect the mind : but meat, when it is taken into the body, does not go to the heart, but into the stomach and belly, and is thence cast out. There can be no impurity in it, therefore, that can defile the mind.

18. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man.

The language of the lips is tainted with the corrupt dispositions of the heart, which is the source of every thing which is defiling and wicked.

19. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, “ *wicked reasonings ;*” *such as those of the Pharisees ;* murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, “ *evil speaking.*”

20. These are the things which defile a man, *which render him odious to the Divine Being.* But to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the means which God has employed, to secure to parents honour and respect from their children, we may learn the importance of this branch of duty, and the best manner of performing it. It is not left to a child's own option whether he will show respect to his father and mother, or not : nor is it left to be inferred from other precepts ; but it is made the subject of an express command, and that command has the first place in the second table. It is also distinguished by being, as the apostle observes, the first commandment with promise. a notorious neglect of it doomed the

transgressor to the punishment of death. The obligation to this duty arises from the plainest principles of gratitude and justice; for what can be more reasonable than that those who have fed and supported us; who have spent their time in instructing us in our duty, and in forming us to virtuous habits and useful characters; who have experienced much anxiety, and submitted to great labour, for these benevolent purposes, should receive a considerable return of gratitude and attention for these services? Must not that mind be insensible to every principle of goodness, and wholly brutish, which does not feel the force of these considerations? If children then wish to preserve any character for propriety of conduct, or to secure the favour of an Almighty Being, let them not neglect so just and important a duty. Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is well-pleasing to him: it is one of the worst symptoms of the most degenerate times, when children are disobedient to parents, and without natural affection. Let children, however, remember, that the honour which reason and the law of God require for their parents, does not consist in words only, in fair speeches of empty respect, but in substantial support when it is needed, in assiduous endeavours to soften the miseries and lighten the burdens of age: and in sacrificing their time, their ease, and their substance, in order to promote these ends.

2. We are here taught in what light to regard the commandments of men in religious concerns—that they always corrupt and injure religion, and ought, therefore, to be opposed, by those who value its purity and excellence, not only when they require what is evidently contrary to the law of God, but also when they impose what may appear harmless and indifferent, if it be not countenanced by that authority. Christ would not practise himself, nor suffer his disciples to practise, a ceremony which was in use among the Pharisees, because he knew that it was no where required by the law of Moses; although they could plead in defence of their custom the opinion of the wisest and oldest men among them, and the continued practice of several generations. He was aware that, by complying with this custom, he should countenance men in adding to the law of God; which compliance had already led them to violate one of its plainest precepts, and would open the way for introducing a multitude of other rites, by attending to which the substance of religion would be neglected. It would have been well if a claim to impose religious ceremonies had ceased with the Pharisees: the professed disciples of Christ have likewise assumed it; and it continues to be maintained to the present day, either upon the ground of an infallible judgment, or under the pretence of maintaining decency and order in divine worship. But on whatever principle such authority is claimed, it is entirely without foundation, and ought to be resisted; whether it be made by an ecclesiastical or civil governor; by one person or a great number. Both those who submit to this usurpation, and those who practise it, may possibly be offended at our opposition or neglect, as the Pharisees were offended at Christ: they may charge us with impiety or obstinacy, and denounce against us the vengeance of heaven, if they do not proceed to greater violence. Let us not,

however, be terrified by their actions or their threatenings : the vengeance of heaven is not at their disposal ; and if we suffer any temporal punishment at their hands, we may support ourselves with reflecting that we follow the example of the best guide, and that we suffer for maintaining the purity of his religion.

3. Let us be thankful for the hope which our Saviour has given us, that every addition to the divine law, every doctrine or ceremony of human invention, shall be removed. There is much of this kind now in the Christian church, as there was formerly in the Jewish : the work of reformation proceeds but slowly, and meets with many obstructions ; but let us not therefore conclude, that a complete change will never take place. The promises of Christ and of his apostles upon this subject are faithful ; there are many appearances in the present state of the church and of the world, which show that reformation is advancing, however gradually ; and that it will one day arrive. Let us, in the mean time, continue to hope and pray for this desirable period, and exert ourselves to hasten it, by discountenancing, both by our words and actions, all antichristian claims, corrupt doctrines, and unnecessary ceremonies.

SECTION XXXVI.

Christ heals the daughter of a woman of Canaan, and feeds four thousand persons.

MATTHEW xv. 21—39.

21. THEN Jesus went thence, and departed into, “*towards,*” the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, *for it does not appear that he left Judæa.*

22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him saying, Have mercy on me, Lord, “*O master,*” thou son of David : my daughter is grievously vexed with a dæmon.

The Canaanites were, strictly speaking, inhabitants of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon ; although the term is sometimes used in a larger sense, so as to include the inhabitants of the whole country at this time occupied by the Jews. The fame of Christ’s miracles had long since extended itself into this country ; and, along with it, his character as the Messiah or son of David had been made known to the people. This induced this woman to apply to him with great importunity on behalf of her daughter, who was afflicted with phrensy, or some other of those bodily disorders, which were ignorantly attributed to the spirits of dead men taking possession of the living.

23. But he answered her not a word :

As she was a heathen, he was not inclined to take notice of her case.

And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away ; for she crieth after us.

24. But he answered, and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Christ was sent by God to preach the words of salvation to the Jews only, and to confirm it by miraculous works : a numerous seed was indeed promised to him from among the Gentiles : but this was not to take place till after his death, when he was no longer a messenger of the divine will, but seated at the right hand of God. This limitation of his message was not, however, inconsistent with his bestowing favours, occasionally, upon strangers, whom he found within the limits of the land of Israel. The reason of his refusal, for so long a time, to listen to the request of this woman, was that she might have an opportunity of showing forth her faith, to the shame of the Jews.

25. Then came she, and worshipped him, "*fell down at his feet,*" saying, Lord, help me.

26. But he answered and said, It is not meet, "*right,*" to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs.

It is not right to perform those miraculous works for the benefit of the Gentiles, which were intended for the use of the children of God, the nation of the Jews. To call the Gentiles dogs, seems to be contemptuous ; but this language was familiarly used by the Jews ; and our Lord employs it on this occasion, in order to try the faith and patience of this woman, whom he meant to relieve.

27. And she said, Truth, Lord, "*Yea, master,*" yet, "*for,*" the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

The woman admits the propriety of the comparison which our Lord had made use of, and skilfully takes occasion thence to enforce her request. "I acknowledge that persons of my nation, when compared with the Jews, are no better than dogs ; yet what I ask is no great favour ; it is but like the crumb which the dog is allowed to pick from under the table."

28. Then Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith ; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was healed from that very hour, "*from that moment.*"

From this instant, the phrensy with which she was before afflicted, and which had been attributed to the influence of dæmons, left her ; so that when her mother returned home, she found her composed ; and, as Mark tells us, lying upon the bed. Her faith was

great, in that she believed that Christ could cure her daughter, who was at a distance, and was also a Gentile.

29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee, and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

30. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, "*that had lost a limb*," and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them.

31. Insomuch, that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, those who had lost a limb, to be made whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified the God of Israel.

They considered these miracles not so much as performed by Jesus Christ himself, as being the effects of the divine power residing in him: they therefore very justly ascribe the praise of them to God.

32. Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: I will not send them away, fasting, lest they should faint in the way.

The multitude spent the night in the open air, which might be safely done in that warm climate, and was no unusual practice. Their provisions were all expended, so that they had nothing left, at the time when Jesus spoke.

33. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

It seems extraordinary that the disciples should say what they are here represented as saying, after having seen five thousand fed with five loaves and two fishes; and when they had on this occasion seven loaves and a few little fishes while the multitude was but four thousand; so that they had more provisions and fewer to feed: how came they, therefore, to think that the same power which made a less number of loaves suffice, could not also make a larger to be sufficient? This shows that the character which Christ gives of them is just, when he says to them in one place, "O ye of little faith:" and in another, "O faithless and perverse generation;" and intimates that their faith was less than a grain of mustard-seed, which is the least of all seeds.

34. And Jesus said unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

35. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground ;

36. And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, (*to God,*) and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

37. And they did eat and were filled ; and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets-full.

Christ commanded this to be done, in order that it might appear that there had been a miraculous increase of provisions ; the quantity that was left being greater than what he had at the beginning. He might also intend to teach them that economy was to be practised in the midst of plenty ; and that none of the gifts of divine bounty were to be wasted.

38. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

39. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

This town was the native place of one of the Marys who is mentioned in the New Testament, and who is therefore called Mary Magdalene.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the conduct of the woman of Canaan we have a striking example of the strength of parental affection. Had she been asking for her own life, she could not have pleaded with more earnestness and importunity than she does here, for the recovery of her daughter from a grievous disorder. Although her first request is treated with neglect, she renews it again and again, following our Lord with her cries, and at last throwing herself down at his feet, and addressing him in the humblest language of supplication, "Lord, have mercy upon me ; Lord, help me." Let parents when their children are afflicted with illness, learn where to apply for their recovery ; even to the power of God, which gave life at first, and is able to restore it. Let them not be discouraged, if their prayers are not immediately answered : this may be necessary to exercise their faith and patience for a time ; but God may be merciful unto them at last : let them, therefore, pray and not faint. Not that they are to expect God to depart from the usual course of nature, and to work miracles to restore health, as he did in the present case ; but it is right that they should pray for those things which they earnestly desire, in order to impress their minds with a sense of their dependence upon God for all good things ; to make them grateful to him if they are bestowed, and resigned to his will if they are withholden.

2. Let us be thankful to God that we are no longer in the wretched state of the Gentiles ; aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise ; possessing, indeed, the bounties of Divine Providence in great abundance, but so neglected or despised by God, as scarcely, to be allowed the smallest favour from him, in the way of miracle or divine revelation ; not even the crumbs which fall from a plentiful table. Now, blessed be God, our condition is entirely changed ; we are placed at his table ourselves ; we have a seat among his children ; eat without restraint of the provisions prepared for them, and enjoy all the privileges of God's household. Let us never cease to bless and praise the Divine Being for this happy change.

3. How surprising and various are the miracles of Christ ! The diseased and afflicted assemble round him from every quarter of the country, and form a wretched meeting of the most disgusting and miserable objects which the imagination can conceive. Some, deprived of the use of a limb, and incapable of moving at all, or without great pain ; others, from some of those accidents to which human life is ever exposed, with limbs cut off, presenting their mangled bodies, without a finger, an arm, or a leg ; some, like the brutes, incapable of speaking, and only able to express their thoughts by mute signals ; others, blind from their birth, who had never yet seen the glorious light of the sun, or the cheerful face of nature, more helpless and incapable of directing themselves than a child ; others, whose wild looks, incoherent discourse, and extravagant actions too plainly discovered that reason no longer presided in the soul, and that all was confusion and disorder within. Such were the wretched objects with which Jesus was surrounded ; men labouring under the greatest of human calamities, and their spirits, where they were capable of reflection, oppressed with disappointment and despair of relief by any natural means ; sufficient to move the compassion of the most obdurate heart. But the scene suddenly changes : the bodies of the diseased are restored at once to a sound state, and every thing that is painful or offensive disappears at the presence of the Saviour. With what rapture must he who had lost a limb, or to whom it was rendered useless, perceive it restored in a sound state ! How would he exercise his newly-acquired member ! With what pleasure would he lift up his new hand, and leap upon his new limb ; scarcely believing what he felt and saw, for joy ! How eagerly would the dumb exercise his tongue in the newly-acquired faculty of speech ! How would the blind behold at once all the beauties of creation ! No one can conceive the wonder and joy which must pervade every heart on such an occasion, any more than the grateful acknowledgments which they would make to their kind deliverer, or the pleasure which he must feel on beholding the happy effects of his power.

Well might the surrounding multitude glorify God for producing so wonderful a change, and permitting them to behold it ; and justly may we join our thanksgiving to theirs, when we learn such things, in a less perfect manner from history.

SECTION XXXVII.

The Pharisees and Sadducees ask a sign from heaven. Christ warns his disciples against them.

MATTHEW xvi. 1—12.

1. THE Pharisees also, with the Sadducees, came, and tempting, "*trying*," him, desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven.

We know that these two sects, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were totally opposite in their religious principles, and cordially hated each other : yet we find them united together in an attempt to ensnare him whom they esteemed their common enemy. What they asked from him was a sign from heaven ; something, perhaps, like what Moses exhibited, when he brought hail and lightning upon the Egyptians ; or Elijah, when he called down fire from heaven, first, to destroy a party of men who came to seize him, and afterwards, to consume a sacrifice. Some miracle of this kind these Jews required Christ to exhibit ; they had seen him perform many other wonders, such as healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and multiplying a few loaves into provision for many thousands ; with these they were not satisfied, because they pretended that there was room for artifice and collusion in these miracles, which were performed on earth ; but if they beheld a miracle in the heavens, where there was no room for imposture, they intimated that they should be satisfied that he was the Messiah.

2. He answered, and said unto them, When it is evening ye say, It will be fair weather : for the sky is red.

3. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day : for the sky is red and lowering, "*gloomy*." O ye hypocrites ! Ye can discern the face of the sky, "*ye can judge of the face of the sky* ;" but can ye not judge of the signs of the times ?

You pretend that I have not given you sufficient proof that I am the Messiah ; but you do this only from a desire to cavil and find fault : for you are satisfied with much less evidence in other instances. From the appearance of the sky, you think that you can prognosticate what kind of weather is approaching, and imagine that, with this advantage, you need not be informed of what is coming : yet you demand signs of the coming of the Messiah, as if none were already given ; whereas you have many and decisive proofs of that event, to which, however, you have not leisure or inclination to attend. Were you to examine the declarations of the prophets, as carefully as you observe the face of the heavens

before you take a journey, you would see without doubt that the end of the seventy weeks of Daniel was at hand ; that the morals of the people are become most corrupt ; that you, the leaders of the people, either destroy the seeds of piety, by taking away the hope of a future life, or convert all religion into useless ceremonies ; on the other side you would see that, a doctrine of the most distinguished purity is preached by me, and accompanied with miracles, calculated not to gratify the vain humours of men, but to afford substantial benefit to them, giving sight to the blind, feet to the lame, and health to those that are sick ; all which things are unquestionable proofs of the Messiah's kingdom being come.

4. A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

These two sects are called an adulterous generation, because they had both of them departed from the doctrines of true religion ; in the same manner as forsaking the true God to worship idols, is compared perpetually in the Old Testament to a breach of the marriage vow, and called adultery. Our Lord here makes a very obscure allusion to his own resurrection, as resembling the miracle of Jonah's deliverance from the whale's belly, which it was impossible that these Jews should understand ; and he does not seem to have intended that they should. To men who were so wilfully blind he did not think it necessary to explain himself more fully, but left them immediately to go to another place. The same demand had been made to Christ before, and he had replied in the same manner, but a little more fully than in the present instance. See Matt. xii. 38—40. His meaning in both places is, " You seek a sign or miracle from heaven, but none shall be given you greater or more excellent than that which shall come, not from the heavens, as ye foolishly require, but from the bowels of the earth, whence I shall be raised on the third day, after being put to death by your malice ; and hereby completely establish the innocence of my character and my claim to a divine mission."

5. And when his disciples were come to the other side, *i. e. of the lake of Genesareth*, they had forgotten, *they found that they had forgotten*, to take bread.

6. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

It is the nature of leaven to extend itself widely ; on this account, the Christian doctrine, which was to spread through the world, was before compared to leaven ; but here false opinions are compared to the same substance, and probably for the same reason, because they are likely to spread themselves. Our Lord, going back to the subject of the Pharisees and Sadducees whom they had

just left, warns his disciples to beware of their doctrines. That doctrine of the Pharisees to which he referred was, probably, the maxim that the traditions of the elders were of equal, if not of superior authority to the law of God: that doctrine of the Sadducees which he thought dangerous, was the notion that generally prevailed among that sect, that there was no resurrection from the dead, or state of future recompense.

7. And they reasoned among themselves, *not silently but openly*, It is because we have taken no bread.

They thought, that as Jesus knew they wanted bread, he intended to warn them not to procure it from the sect either of the Pharisees or Sadducees; as if such bread was likely to defile them: so speedily had the precepts of Christ, by which he had taught that such things could not defile the mind, been forgotten by them: they began to be seriously alarmed about the want of bread, especially as Christ had, in their apprehension, increased the difficulty, by narrowing the circle of those of whom they were to buy.

8. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith! Why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

That is, Why should you think that this was said by me, because you had not a stock of bread: as if it was necessary that you should perish with hunger, if you did not receive bread from men, but must avoid, at any rate, to take any from the Pharisees or Sadducees. Could I not feed you, although you could procure no bread from others? There was no reason, therefore, why, on that account, I should so carefully forbid you to have any intercourse with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

9. Do ye not understand, neither remember, the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

10. Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

Had ye recollected these miracles, or reasoned properly upon them, you would not have supposed that I could have been under any anxiety about the want of bread, or have given you any directions about buying it, when I could so easily supply my own wants and yours by a miracle.

11. How is that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

12. Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

REFLECTIONS.

1. To discover sagacity and wisdom in the common affairs of life, and yet to betray the greatest stupidity or prejudice in religious concerns, is but too just a picture of the conduct of many of the human race at the present day. How many are there who will believe nothing in the ordinary concerns of life without substantial evidence; who wisely resolve to manage all important matters of a temporal nature for themselves, and not to confide blindly in the discretion of other men; yet in religion are ready to believe whatever their parents or the church have taught them to be true; trust the salvation of their souls to others, as if it were a matter of no consequence, and take no pains to secure their eternal welfare. If the symptoms of a dangerous disease appear in their bodies, their fears are alarmed, and they resolve immediately to apply any remedy which may be well recommended; but although the mind is afflicted with the most violent distemper, and they are told that without the utmost care and exertion it will prove fatal, they discover no fear, and take no pains to remove it till it is past cure. Men believe the account which is given of past transactions, from the evidence of history: yet reject the history of Christ, which is founded upon better and more authentic evidence than any other history in the world. So inconsistent are men with themselves, and so true is it that the same persons are not equally wise in every thing. Let us learn hence to exercise our own judgment in all important matters, and not trust to the judgment of other men, nor to think unfavourably of a good cause, because some persons, distinguished for their sagacity in other things, do not countenance it. If the evidence which we have for the truth of Christianity be sufficient to justify us in embracing it, let us not be prevented from doing so, because we may fancy to ourselves that it might have been attended with something more striking and decisive.

2. Let us carefully guard against all corruptions of religion. They are a leaven that have spread themselves until they have leavened the whole mass. The admission of one error prepares the way for the admission of a second, and a third, in endless succession. To allow the claims of human authority in matters of religion, in one instance, will lead to the assertion of the same claims in many more, until it has left to itself no limits. This we might have been able to infer from the nature of the human mind, which argues from analogy, and applies the principles upon which it has reasoned in one case, to another; so that what has misled men on one occasion will be employed to mislead them again. We know also that this apprehension of the tendency of error is just, from two striking examples; the church of the Jews in our Saviour's

time, and the church of Rome among Christians. Who could have imagined that such a system of absurdity and folly could have arisen from the admission of one error ! Who could have supposed that paying divine honours to any one besides the Supreme Being could have led to the worship of angels ; to the worship of the Virgin Mary ; to the worship of saints in general ; and at length, to the worship of a piece of bread ! Let us, therefore, carefully guard against the leaven of corruption ; it is no matter whence it comes ; it is always attended with danger.

SECTION XXXVIII.

Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God.

MATTHEW xvi. 13—20.

13. WHEN Jesus came into the coasts, “*into the parts,*” of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the son of man, am ? *i. e. I, who appear in mean and humble circumstances, like the most ordinary person.*

This Cæsarea was a town about thirty miles to the north of the sea of Galilee. It had the name of Philippi, to distinguish it from another town of the name of Cæsarea, which lay upon the sea-coast, and is often mentioned in the acts of the apostles.

14. And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist ; some, Elias ; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

It was the opinion of the Pharisees, whose sentiments prevailed most among the common people, that the souls of good men passed into other bodies, and in this manner appeared again in the world. Hence the notion was derived that Jesus Christ might be John the Baptist, Jeremiah, or some one of the old prophets. With respect to Elijah, as he was taken up into heaven, they imagined that he would descend thence, and appear again in person ; an error into which they were led from a mistaken interpretation of a passage in the prophet Malachi ; where God says, “*I will send you the prophet Elijah, before the great and terrible day of the Lord ;*” which they took literally. Why they supposed Christ to be Jeremiah in particular, does not appear : perhaps it was for no other reason than that this prophet was held in the highest estimation among them. It appears that those who entertained these opinions concerning Christ, could have heard nothing respecting his birth, and that the fame of his miracles must have reached them very lately : for it was not long since John was beheaded.

15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am ?

From this question it appears that Christ had never told his own disciples that he was the Messiah ; but had left them, as well as other persons, to collect it from his miracles, and other evidence.

16. And Simon Peter answered, and said, Thou art Christ, "*the Christ*," the Son of the living God.

Christ is a Greek word, which signifies anointed ; the same as Messiah does in Hebrew. It has its origin in this circumstance, that prophets, priests, and kings, among the Jews and all those who were appointed to any public office by God, were anointed with oil, and initiated into their office by the solemn performance of this rite : but Jesus is called the anointed in the prophecies of the Old Testament, by way of distinction and eminence, because he was to be superior to all kings and prophets that went before him. Thus David calls him in the second Psalm, ver. 2, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed;" or, as you have it in Acts iv. 26, "against his Christ." The most remarkable prophecy is that of Daniel, who mentions the time at which this anointed messenger was to appear ; Dan. ix. 25, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, unto Messiah the prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks."

This great prince and eminent prophet, foretold in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and expected by the Jews, Peter now, in the name of the other apostles, acknowledges Jesus to be : he calls him likewise the Son of the living God. The Divine Being is called the living God in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, to distinguish him from the gods of the Gentiles, which did not really live, but were the fictions of men's imaginations. Christ is called the Son of God on account of the very extraordinary power with which he was endowed, or, as it is expressed in the language of Scripture, *anointed*, and the important commission delivered to him. These were distinguished marks of the divine favour : such proofs of affection parents do not usually bestow upon every person, indifferently, but only upon a child whom they love. In this character of a favourite son of the common Father of all mankind does Jesus appear.

17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed, "*happy*," art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, *son of Jonah or John, to distinguish him from other Simons* : for flesh and blood, "*man*," hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

That by flesh and blood, when opposed to God, we are to understand men, is evident from what Paul says, Gal. i. 16, that after having received a revelation from God, he conferred not with flesh and blood ; that is, not with any man. Christ here describes men by the appellation of flesh and blood, to intimate that they were weak and imperfect teachers upon this subject, and not acquainted with the truth. Peter had obtained his knowledge from a better source, even from God. When God is here said to have revealed

to Peter, that Jesus was the Christ, we are not to understand it of an immediate and extraordinary revelation made to him ; for that would have been unnecessary : but of his having been taught it by God, in the school of his prophet Jesus Christ. That he became the disciple of Jesus, and was possessed of an unprejudiced mind to discern the truth, was the gift of God and to be attributed to him. The words may be thus paraphrased : “ In acquiring this conviction that I am the Messiah, thou hast followed a better principle than that by which the Jews in general are influenced, and for which thou art indebted to God, who is the author of every thing that is good in us.”

18. And I say also unto thee, *in return for this open confession*, that thou art Peter ; *truly named Peter*.

The proper name of Peter was Simon ; but when he was first brought to Jesus, he, who from the countenance of the man, perceived his disposition, and his readiness for executing great designs, gave him the name of Cephas ; in the Syriac language signifying a stone, which in the Greek is Peter. Peter, therefore, having now given such an excellent specimen of his own proficiency, Jesus praises him. I do not, says he, repent that I gave thee the name of Peter : for I see that thou art worthy of that name, and that thou wilt be the great support of my religion in the world.

And, “*for*,” upon this rock, “*stone*,” I will build my church.

When Christ spoke these last words, it is probable that he pointed to Peter with his finger or by a nod : for that would correspond with his design, which was to assign the reason of giving this name to Peter. We have examples in Scripture of a like change of name. Thus it is said of Abram, “ thy name shall be Abraham, because I have made thee the father of many nations ;” and of Jacob, “ thy name shall be Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and men, and hast prevailed.” So of Peter, Christ says, “ Thou art so called, because thou shalt be like a rock.” The meaning of this figurative language is this : I will make thee the first resolute professor of my religion, by whose services my church shall be established. Christ here refers to the time when Peter was the first to announce to the Jews, immediately after the resurrection of Jesus, and in a short time afterwards to the Gentiles, in the case of Cornelius, the important truth which he had now professed, that Jesus was the Christ. The resurrection of Jesus, which establishes his claim to a divine mission, was believed by the Jews and Gentiles on the joint testimony of the apostles, but more especially on that of Peter. In this manner was Peter made the rock or foundation of the great body of Christians. Christ is in other places called the stone, and the only foundation : for it is no unusual thing in the sacred writers, that the same simile should be used to signify different things in different places. Paul calls himself a master-builder ;

but Christ here claims this honour to himself: "upon this rock *I* will build my church."

The word *church*, which here first occurs in the New Testament, originally signified any assembly of people; but was used by the Jewish writers to express the whole body of the people of Israel. Thus Stephen, Acts vii. 38, says that Moses was with the *church* in the wilderness; meaning the whole Jewish nation.—In the same manner, Christ here applies the term to the whole body of Christians: for the people of Israel, living in one country, bore a resemblance to the multitude of Christians, who, though dispersed throughout every country, were united by a common faith. These constitute the church of Christ, as the other constituted the church of God.

And the gates of hell, "*of the grave*," shall not prevail against it.

It is generally agreed that hell does not here signify the place of punishment for wicked men and other wicked beings; but the place of the dead; the grave. Thus Hezekiah, in lamenting over the shortening of his life, says, "I shall go to the gates of the grave." Is. xxxviii. 10. David varies the phrase a little, when he says, (Ps. ix. 13,) "Thou liftest me up from the gates of death;" and in another place, the Psalmist says of some, (cvii. 18,) "Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death."—The gates of the grave then signify, by an easy figure, the power of the grave; and Christ must be understood to promise to Peter and the rest of the apostles, that notwithstanding their death, the church of Christ should continue in the world and flourish. Others interpret the words somewhat differently, and suppose that as assemblies for trying criminals were held in the gates of cities, the gates of death must mean those who had the power of life and death in their hands. The promise of Christ will therefore imply, according to this account of the passage, that none of the devices of the enemies of the church shall succeed against it; or, in other words, that the Christian religion shall never become extinct in the world.

19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven here signifies the Christian Church, or a society of people whom the God of heaven has now collected together, to obey his laws and to enjoy his favour. This church Christ had just compared to a house built upon a rock; to whomsoever, therefore, the keys of the house are delivered, to him a power is entrusted of admitting into the house, or excluding from it, particular persons, according to the pleasure of the master of the house. The meaning of these words of Christ therefore is; "I give thee a power of admitting into my church, both from among Jews and Gentiles, those who are worthy of that honour; and of excluding from it those who are unworthy."

And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shalt be, "*will be*," bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Commentators differ greatly about the interpretation of these words. That interpretation seems to be most easy and natural which supposes that by binding and loosing, when applied to keys, is signified the same thing as shutting and opening. Gates and doors in ancient times, were shut with cords, for binding or loosing which, a key was used; so that what with us is to shut and open the door, with them was to bind and loose it. When, therefore, binding is applied to persons, who are here spoken of, it means the same thing as shutting out; and loosing signifies admitting. The passage might, therefore, be thus translated: "If thou reject any from my church on earth, the rejection shall be ratified with God; if thou admit any, the admission also shall be ratified in like manner;" so that the sense of the whole verse will be this: "I grant thee, Peter, after my return to heaven, a power of unlocking the entrance into my church, both to Jews and Gentiles: if thou find any unworthy to be admitted into the body of Christians, and exclude them from the society of believers; or if thou judge others worthy to be received into the number of my disciples, on account of their possessing a teachable disposition, and having their manners formed agreeably to the laws of the gospel, both thy acts shall be ratified with God in heaven."

According to this interpretation, no new thing is promised to Peter; but what was said in the preceding verse is expressed in different words; namely, that he should be made the foundation upon which the Christian church should be built.

20. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

Many manuscripts omit the word Jesus here, and it evidently appears to be an error, introduced by some means into the text: for Jesus was his proper name, by which he was known to every one; he could not, therefore, prohibit his disciples from telling men that he was what they already knew him to be. What he forbade them was to say that he was the Christ. The power of proclaiming that he was the Messiah, he reserved for himself, and exercised as he saw occasion, according to the circumstances of time and place. He had commanded the apostles, indeed, to preach the kingdom of God; this, however, was nothing more than teaching that the kingdom of the Messiah was at hand, and that men must reform their lives, which the apostles could do, although they did not declare who was the Messiah.

The reason why Christ enjoined silence upon his disciples in regard to this subject, was because he foresaw that if it were publicly proclaimed, such were the erroneous notions which prevailed respecting the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, and so much were the passions of the people inflamed against the haughty government of the Romans, that dreadful tumults would be the necessary consequence, and occasion would be afforded his adversaries to accuse him of aiming at an earthly kingdom. He knew,

at the same time, that his miracles and discourses were sufficient to prove that he was the Messiah ; and that a conviction produced in this manner would be more useful to men than one arising from his own declarations.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE learn hence how ill founded are the claims of the popes. From what Christ says to Peter, about building his church upon him, giving him the keys and the power of binding and loosing, they have inferred that this apostle was made the head of the college of apostles ; that he was invested with supreme power over the Christian church, to prescribe the terms of admission into it, and also the terms of admission into heaven ; that all his decisions upon these subjects are infallible, and that the same authority which he possessed himself, descends to his successors, the bishops of Rome. These extravagant doctrines they have built, or attempted to build upon this figurative language ; but we find that the words of Christ convey no such meaning, and that they are best interpreted upon totally opposite principles. They promise to Peter an honour which has long since been enjoyed by him, that of being the chief instrument, in the hands of Providence, in introducing Jews and Gentiles into the Christian church, and hereby becoming, next after Christ, the principal foundation of that glorious building which was erected by God. It appears that whatever authority he possessed was confined entirely to himself, and that nothing is said or implied about its descending from him to his successors. So little is there in this passage of Scripture, to countenance a power which has been made equal to that of God himself, and which has been employed to support all kinds of superstition and wickedness in the world.

2. How delightful is it to reflect that the church of Christ is built upon a rock, and that it cannot be destroyed by the revolutions of time or the designs of its enemies ! The cause of Christian truth has often appeared to rest upon the abilities and zeal of a few advocates, who have supported it in the world by the force of their exertions and eloquence : when they are removed and laid in the gates of the grave, we are disposed to think that its foundations have been undermined, and that it cannot long subsist : but let us not be discouraged by such events : Christ has promised that the gates of the grave shall not prevail against it. The loss of faithful and active ministers, or of other distinguished members of the church, shall be repaired by successors of the same spirit and talents, raised up by Providence for this purpose ; if not in the same part of the church where the former flourished, yet in some other. This cause has the protection of heaven for its support, and will never be suffered to fall for want of able defenders : if it could bear the removal of Christ and the death of the apostles, there can be no other losses which time may produce that it will have any reason to fear.

The church is as secure against the devices of its enemies as against the power of death. Many are the designs which have been formed against the Christian religion, at different periods of time, by open enemies or pretended friends, with the hope of destroying it by fraud or violence : but they have all, hitherto, proved unsuccessful. Similar attempts may be made at present, or in future ages, but they shall all be equally fruitless : they are the poor devices of human wisdom against that which is divine ; the feeble efforts of an arm of flesh against the hand of the Almighty. Let not the friends of religion be alarmed by such endeavours ; let them not especially have recourse to any unjustifiable methods for its defence. Let them not attempt to restrain by force any such attacks, or to defeat them by any kind of fraud or stratagem. The cause in which they are engaged is too well established to need the assistance of such arts.

This church which Christ has founded, has already lasted eighteen hundred years : in that time the world has been agitated with convulsions, which have torn the mighty empires and kingdoms of it from their foundations ; but this building has stood secure ; nor will it be impaired by eighteen hundred years more, if the world should last so long : heaven and earth shall sooner pass away than the words of Christ fail.

SECTION XXXIX.

Christ foretels his death and resurrection to his disciples.

MATTHEW xvi. 21—28.

21. FROM that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Jesus, having, by the commendation which he bestowed on Simon Peter's answer, acknowledged that he was the Messiah, endeavoured to prepare the minds of his disciples, which were filled with the expectation of temporal felicity, for the last scenes of his life ; lest they should be too much offended with these events, and their belief that he was the Christ be overturned. It appears, by what follows, that the apostles were not even now ready to receive these things ; nevertheless, from these predictions of Jesus, to which the event exactly corresponded, and from his firm purpose to submit to the most cruel and ignominious death, it is evident how remote his conduct was from all imposture and fraud ; even from that which is called pious fraud, by which men are deceived with a design of doing them good.

The elders here mentioned by Christ as the authors of his sufferings, were not necessarily persons advanced in years, but the members of the Jewish Sanhedrim, by whom he was tried and condemned. The chief priests were also a part of this body ; but they are mentioned here separately, on account of the great influence which their opinions had in public affairs. The scribes were learned interpreters of the law, who assisted this court with their advice in difficult cases. These three classes of men are mentioned in promiscuous order, whenever the Sanhedrim is spoken of in the New Testament.

22. Then Peter took him, “ *took him up,*” and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, “ *master,*” this shall not be unto thee.

We have here a fresh example of the forwardness of Peter. In consequence of the praises which had just been bestowed upon him, he acquired such boldness, as not to fear to reprove his Master himself : he thought that those things which Jesus had said, concerning the calamities which were coming upon him, and concerning his death, by no means agreed with the dignity of the Messiah. He therefore reprimanded him for saying things which little became him : as if he had said ; “ If any thing of this kind threatens thee, as thou wilt be a king, thou must employ thy royal power, to preserve thyself for thy friends ; nor can it be borne that such unworthy things should happen to thee.”

23. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, “ *go out of my sight,*” Satan ; thou art an offence unto me, “ *a snare unto me.*”

Satan is a Hebrew word, which signifies an adversary, or one who gives bad, useless, or pernicious counsel ; an evil adviser. So when Abishai advised David to put Shimei to death, 2 Sam. xix. 22, David replied, “ What have I to do with you, ye sons of Seruiah, that ye should be adversaries unto me ?” or, as it is in the original, *Satan* unto me ? By giving Peter this appellation, Christ shows, that under the appearance of affection, he was really his adversary. “ Thou art a snare unto me ; as far as in thee lies, thou inspirest me with a dread of ignominious torments and death, which the weakness of nature is too apt to feel, and which would lead me to decline suffering, and to neglect my duty.”

For thou savourest not, “ *thou regardest not,*” the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Thou attendest to and thinkest much of those things which please men, and which relate to the conveniences of this life, rather than those which are necessary for reestablishing and preserving mankind in the paths of salvation, which is the design that God has in view. Peter, imagining that the Messiah was to be a temporal king, thought of nothing but what would suit such a plan, and totally overlooked the spiritual purposes of his mission, which might be most effectually promoted by sufferings and death.

24. Then said Jesus unto his disciples ; If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

If any one will attend upon me, he must renounce his own convenience, and cheerfully submit to the greatest evils ; such as taking the cross, to be crucified upon it, must be.

Christ here alludes to the opinion of the vulgar, which he therefore refutes. That man, in their estimation, renounces and disowns himself, who does not labour with all his care to preserve the conveniences of life, and especially life itself. Yet such a deserter of himself the Christian must be : he must hold in contempt his own life, and be ready to submit to the loss of it, for the profession of the Christian religion ; this loss Christ here recommends to his disciples, from the consideration, that it will be their greatest gain.

25. For whosoever will save, "*wishes to save,*" his life shall lose it ; and whosoever will, "*shall,*" lose his life, for my sake, will find it.

The meaning of these words is this : " He who wishes to preserve his life, in this world, will render himself miserable in the next ; and he who submits to death in my cause here, provides for his own happiness hereafter." To wish to preserve life, is to be unwilling to submit to death, for the sake of religion ; to wish rather to live on earth than to be thrown into prison, and to submit to a public execution : for at this time the greatest dangers were often to be encountered by the professors of the gospel.

26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ; "*his life :*" or what shall a man give in exchange for his life ?

The word here rendered *soul* is translated life in the preceding verse ; and agreeably to this Luke says, ' lose himself.' What will it profit a man, says our Lord, if he should acquire all the wealth of the world, but with the loss of life ? This is a proverbial maxim, which Christ transfers from this temporal life to that which is eternal. He had just been telling his disciples, in the preceding verse, that if they submitted to the loss of life in his cause, they would be gainers by it ; which he now endeavours to prove in this manner : " If we think that all the things which we possess are wisely expended, in order to preserve ourselves in this life, how much more should the conveniences of this life, and this mortal life itself be resigned, to render ourselves partakers of that happiness which the Messiah has promised shall be conferred upon his disciples in a future life !"

27. For the son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels ; and then he shall reward, "*he shall render to,*" every man according to his works.

Christ teaches that it would certainly happen that they would experience loss who spared their lives, and that those would have gain who despised life for the sake of the gospel ; because a day of recompense was approaching.

The glory of God sometimes signifies the divine majesty, the attributes and excellences on account of which the highest honours are due to him ; at other times, it signifies a particular branch of the divine excellences, according as the design of the writer or speaker happens to be. Thus in Ps. xix. 1, it is said that the heavens declare the glory of God ; that is, the power of God. As Christ, therefore, in the passage before us, after mentioning the glory of God, immediately adds that he was about to come, that every one of his followers might receive for himself a recompense suitable to his actions, there can be no doubt that by the glory of God, is signified the power which God possesses of determining concerning the life and actions of men ; which power Jesus declares was given to himself by the Father : for he tells us that the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son ; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. By coming with angels, mentioned in this place, may only be signified, a splendid and magnificent appearance : for God is said to come with angels, when any signal work of divine power is performed.

23. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom.

This must refer to some temporal appearance : for some of the disciples were to see it in their life-time : but as only a few were to enjoy that honour, Christ's coming in his kingdom has been supposed to allude to the destruction of Jerusalem, which is frequently thus described. This event happened about forty years afterwards : and several of those who were then present might live to see it ; as we certainly know that the apostle John did.

By mentioning these honours in connexion with his sufferings, Christ intimates that the calamitous events which were about to befall him would not, as Peter and the rest apprehended, at all detract from his dignity.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE learn from this passage, what great difficulties we must be prepared to encounter in the profession of Christianity. We are required, not merely to abstain from particular enjoyments, which are prejudicial to ourselves or to society, but to renounce ourselves : to act as if we were divested of self-love ; as if we disowned the relation in which we stand to ourselves ; as if we felt no concern for the enjoyments of life, or even for life itself, when compared with some other object. What human being is there that is prepared for so hard a service, which requires us to act con-

trary to the strongest principles and feelings of our nature ? Yet was it frequently necessary, in the first ages of the Christian church ; nor is it unusual to see men called to act the same part at the present day ; to give up worldly emoluments and ease ; to hazard every thing that is valuable in their present existence, in order to discharge their duty, and preserve a good conscience.

2. From the reply which Christ made to Peter, we may see in what light we ought to regard those who would dissuade us from discharging our duty, through fear of suffering. With the appearance of friendship they are acting the part of real enemies ; they are tempting us to decline our duty ; they are labouring to rob us of that glory which we may acquire by courageously meeting dangers, or patiently enduring sufferings, in performing the will of God, and obeying the dictates of conscience. Severe trials and dangers are the usual road to high attainments in virtue, and great exaltation under the divine government : so far are they, therefore, from being marks of God's displeasure, that they are often the best proofs of his approbation and favour. It is not the weak and unsteady that he calls forth to encounter great difficulties, who would dishonour themselves, and betray the cause in which they are engaged, by their weakness ; but the firm, the strong, and the resolute, whose virtue cannot be overcome. These are they who are called to the post of danger, which is, therefore, the post of honour. If we are summoned to such a station, let us cheerfully obey the call, and endeavour to behave worthily of the confidence which is placed in us. If any of our friends should attempt to dissuade us from it, by saying that we act against our own interest, that we foolishly throw away our comfort or our lives : let us reject their advice with indignation, as Christ does that of Peter ; let us tell them that they set too much value upon the good things of this life ; that they do not understand, or do not relish, the kind designs of Providence in the trials to which it exposes us ; and that their advice is founded upon the maxims of worldly policy or worldly prudence.

We also learn that those are our best friends, not who endeavour to gain our favour by prophesying smooth things, and telling us that we have nothing to fear ; but who acquaint us plainly with our danger, and endeavour to fortify us for the hour of trial. Thus it was that Christ acted towards his disciples, and in the same manner should we act towards those for whose happiness we are concerned.

Great as the sacrifices are which Christ requires from us, it would be a proof of the greatest folly not to make them : for all that we can hope to secure by declining danger, is our present life, or a few comforts and enjoyments : but how will these balance the greater evils to which we shall expose ourselves hereby ? Will the preservation of life now, compensate for the loss of it hereafter ? a short period of ease and pleasure, for ages of pain and sorrow ? Let us suppose the advantages we gain by avoiding danger, to be as great as they can possibly be ; still they would be no more than a man's gaining the whole world, with the forfeiture of his life — of the only means by which he could hope to enjoy it : a sacrifice

which no wise man would choose to make ! On the other hand, by giving up the present life, in the cause of truth and righteousness, we shall receive in exchange an everlasting existence of unspeakable value ; and for every less sacrifice, a return of a hundred-fold. Nor is this a distant and uncertain reward : the Judge is at the door : as soon as life is ended, the son of man comes to recompense every one according to his works.

SECTION XL.

The Transfiguration.

MATTHEW xvii. 1—13.

1. AND after six days,* Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain, apart.

Although Christ had declared, in the last verses of the preceding chapter, that a glorious manifestation of his kingdom would follow his ignominious death and sufferings ; yet this declaration could not dispel the cloud which had been raised over the minds of his disciples by the prophecy of his sufferings ; especially over the mind of Peter : for their satisfaction, therefore, God wished to declare, in the plainest manner, that Jesus was the Messiah. The reason why these three disciples are selected from the rest was because they were to be the principal instruments in making converts to Christianity. On this account, Peter is called a rock ; and the two brothers, Boanerges, or sons of thunder.† Paul calls these three disciples pillars of the church. Gal. ii. 9. The mountain here mentioned is supposed to be mount Tabor, because that is a high mountain, and not far from Cæsarea, where they were a short time before ; but this by no means affords us a certain conclusion : for the six days which intervened might carry them into a distant part of the country.

2. And was transfigured, “*and his appearance was changed,*” before them ; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light ; or, as Mark has it, “*white as snow.*”‡

By the word *transfigured* we are not to understand that his bodily shape was changed, or that he lost the form of a man ; but that a singular brightness or majesty appeared in his countenance, which it is hardly possible to describe. This brightness was intended to assure his disciples, to whom he had been speaking of his death and sufferings, of the glory he should acquire after those events, when he rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

* Luke, ix. 28, says *eight*.

† Mark iii. 17.

‡ This is likewise the reading of the Cambridge MS. and of several versions.

3. And, behold, there appeared unto them, “*were seen by them,*” *i. e. by the three disciples*, Moses and Elias, talking with him.

It is something remarkable that both Moses and Elijah had, like Jesus, fasted forty days : the one, when he gave the law to the Israelites ; and the other, when he attempted to recover them to a due regard to their law, after a time of great degeneracy. It is observable, also, that Elijah had been translated to heaven without dying ; and though it be said of Moses that he died in the mount to which God called him, yet he went up in perfect health and vigour ; nobody was permitted to accompany him, and his place of burial could never be found. It is, therefore, not improbable that he never properly died, but was translated also. As these persons spake to Christ, according to Luke ix. 31, of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem, it is probable that they appeared in order to prepare him for that event ; by assuring him, from the testimony of his senses, that after his death he should be in the same state of glory and happiness as themselves. We may presume, therefore, that Moses and Elijah, as well as Enoch, are now living with Christ.

4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, “*Master,*” it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, “*tents ;*” one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

Peter was so pleased with the glory of Christ and of these two other persons, that he wished to remain here always : if the foretaste of future glory was so delightful to him, how much more so must the reality be ! Mark ix. 6, tells us that Peter said this without knowing what he said : he was so astonished with the splendour of the appearance, that he had not the full possession of himself.

5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him.

A bright cloud, sending forth lightning, was formerly the splendid symbol of the divine presence ; by this cloud, therefore, the disciples were warned that God was about to work here in an extraordinary manner. God had spoken before from a cloud, in an audible voice, to the children of Israel ; and he now speaks, to declare Jesus to be his beloved Son. This appellation means the same thing as only-begotten son : for an only son, is always a beloved child. “*In whom I am well-pleased,*” means upon whom I have set my affections, or with whom I please myself. In this manner are the disciples confirmed in the belief of the truth which had been just made known to them, that Jesus was the Messiah. When they are commanded to hear him, it is signified that they

were not merely to listen to him, but also to obey him. These last words refer to what Moses said to the Jews, Deut. xviii. 15, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;" and hence it appears that Jesus was declared from heaven to be the person promised to the Jews by Moses.

6. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid.

This they did not out of respect to Christ, or to the being who spoke to them, but from consternation, which was so great as to prevent them from knowing what they said or did. A superstitious notion, which prevailed among the children of Israel, that whosoever saw God should die, was perhaps the cause of their terror.

7. And Jesus came, and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.

8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

It was but for a short time that Jesus allowed his disciples to be spectators of his glory; yet it was sufficient to afford them a glimpse of what they should one day be, and to cherish in them the hope of being partakers of this glory, if, after the example of their Master, they constantly and steadily walked in the way leading thither.

9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision, "*sight,*" (*for it was not what we usually understand by a vision,*) to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

This miracle was so clear and decisive a proof that Jesus was the Messiah, that if it had been published among the Jews and believed, they would have made an insurrection in favour of one whom they conceived to be their king and deliverer, and hereby have defeated the purposes which Providence had in view in the mission of Christ. When he was risen from the dead, and had ascended into heaven, there was no danger of this evil consequence: till that time, therefore, Christ orders the matter to be concealed.

10. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?

The occasion of the disciples asking this question, was, that they had just seen Elias in the mount, and that he had immediately disappeared; whereas, according to the doctrine of the scribes, he was to remain among the Jews, to foretel the approach of the Messiah, and point him out to the people. If this opinion were true, they wished to know why he disappeared.

This inference the Jewish doctors drew from a passage in the prophet Malachi (iv. 5, 6,) which has been mentioned more than once already. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." This prophecy the scribes interpreted literally of Elijah the Tishbite, and not of one who should come in the spirit and power of that prophet. In this sense is this passage still understood by the Jews.

11. And Jesus answered, and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, "*doth first come*," and shall restore all things.

The words "and shall restore all things," refer to the verse in Malachi which immediately follows that which I have just quoted; "and he," that is, Elijah, "shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers;" by which words of the prophet, who here expresses himself figuratively, is meant, restore all things, or set all things to rights, in regard to religion. This prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist, in the extraordinary success which accompanied his preaching repentance.

12. But I say unto you that Elias is come already; and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed, "*pleased*;" likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

This is to be understood not merely of the death of John, but of all the ill-treatment which he met with from the Jews: for he was the subject of calumny among their leaders, and fell a victim to the wicked passion of Herod, and the malice of Herodias; nor was Christ to expect better treatment than John, from the same persons.

13. Then the disciples understood that he spake to them of John the Baptist.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the transfiguration of Christ upon the mount, and the circumstances which attended it, we have a slight glimpse into the glory and happiness of the heavenly state, which, if not sufficient to gratify our curiosity, is enough to encourage our hopes. In the person of our Master, on this occasion, we see something of the splendour intended for us, his disciples, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and these vile bodies shall be fashioned like unto his own glorious body: but this change, however splendid and glorious, can give us but a very imperfect notion of the happiness of heaven, which is to consist of pleasure far exceeding our

present conceptions. One thing, however, appears to be certain, that it will arise in part from the society of good men ; and this alone may give us a high idea of its value. How delightful will it be to meet with the worthies of past ages ; with men who have sustained important characters in the world, and have made themselves revered for their virtues by all succeeding generations : with Moses and Elias ; with patriarchs, prophets, and apostles ! What pleasure will it afford us to gain from them the knowledge of the various scenes and transactions in which they have been engaged, and hereby to become acquainted with a faithful and exact history of Divine Providence from the beginning of time ! In this heavenly society we may also expect to meet with many of our own time, whom we may wish to see again ; with friends whose virtues have gained our esteem and love, and with whom we have often conversed with pleasure, while in the present world. With them we may have been frequently led to lament the afflictions of individuals, and to bewail the disorders which prevail in communities and nations of men, and may have been unable to reconcile these events with the wisdom and goodness of an over-ruling Providence : but then we shall find the veil removed from the divine proceedings, and be able to congratulate each other upon discovering that every thing has been ordered in the best manner. While we please ourselves with the prospect of enjoying much happiness from such society, let this animate us to a faithful discharge of the duties of life, by which alone we can hope to attain it. If called to sustain difficult and important offices in the world, or to pass through severe trials, let us look to the glory and happiness to which others have been exalted, as a reward of their integrity, fortitude, and patience ; and more especially, to the honourable situation of the great captain of our salvation, who endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right-hand of God. Nothing can be better adapted to animate our zeal, or support our resolution : for if we are followers of them who through faith and patience now inherit the promise, we shall one day partake of the same reward.

2. In the voice which spoke from the cloud, we have a glorious evidence of the divine character of Jesus, and a plain declaration of the duties we owe to him in that office ; Hear ye him ! The same language is virtually addressed to us by all the miracles which God enabled him to perform. When the sick are healed, when the blind receive their sight, and the dead are raised up, the language of each of these wonderful works is, 'This is my inspired messenger ; hear ye him ! but in the present instance, God condescends to tell us the same thing in an audible voice from heaven.

Let us, therefore, attend to what Christ says : he speaks to us from the authority of God, and what he delivers has the same truth and certainty, as if it were taught by the Divine Being himself. God has sent him into the world, and commanded us to believe and obey him : if we neglect to do either, we commit no light offence : for he that despises him whom God hath sent, despises him who sent him, and incurs the guilt of treating with contempt the Maker of the universe and the Judge of the world.

There have been warm disputes in the world about the person of Christ, to determine who he is : some assert that he is God, united to the person of a man ; others, that he is a superangelic being, who existed before all worlds, but condescended to occupy a human body for the salvation of the world : others, that he is only a man, endowed with extraordinary communications of divine power and knowledge. In the zeal with which mankind have prosecuted these inquiries, they have overlooked the principal part of their duty, which is not so much to determine who Christ is, as to observe what he says. If they believe him to be a divine messenger, teaching the will of God ; if they receive his doctrines and observe his precepts ; the main design of his mission is answered ; they cannot be essentially mistaken ; but without this attention to his precepts, the most exalted notions of his person can be of no avail.

SECTION XII.

Christ heals a lunatic child. The payment of the tribute-money.

MATTHEW xvii. 14—27.

14. And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15. Master, have mercy on my son : for he is lunatic, and sore vexed : for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

The disorder with which this youth was afflicted was the falling sickness, or epilepsy. The circumstances related respecting him by the different Evangelists, some of which only are mentioned by Matthew, exactly correspond with the symptoms of that disease : for they represent him as making grievous outcries, foaming at the mouth, gnashing with his teeth, being convulsed or torn, thrown violently on the ground, and often falling into the fire and into the water ; circumstances which are well known to accompany the epilepsy. These effects the Jews attributed to the influence of the spirit of some wicked man that was now dead, taking possession of the epileptic person, depriving him of the use of his faculties, and exercising a malignant power over the organs of his body. On this account he was called a dæmoniac ; nor need we be surprised that the heathens, and after them the Jews, should ascribe the epilepsy, as well as madness, to possession : for they are kindred disorders : in both, the mind is disordered, and it is no unusual thing for madmen to be subject to epileptic fits. The young man here mentioned is called a lunatic, because the fits, being periodical, and returning after nearly the same intervals, were supposed to be owing to the influence of the moon. Not

that this planet had in reality any efficacy in producing or regulating this disorder, or indeed any other : it was then, and is now, a prevailing, but erroneous notion, that certain diseases observe lunar periods, returning with the full and change of the moon.

This story teaches us the ground of the distinction which is made in the New Testament between lunatics and dæmoniacs. Dæmoniacs were persons disordered in their understandings, and supposed to be possessed by an evil dæmon. Lunatics were epileptics, whose disorder was attributed to the same cause : with this difference only, that it was not permanent, but returned at intervals, which were supposed to be regulated by the moon.

16. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17. Then Jesus answered, and said, O faithless and perverse generation ! how long shall I be with you ? how long shall I suffer you ? Bring him hither to me.

Christ had given his disciples a power over dæmons, and of healing other diseases ; and had promised to be with them, wherever they went, to enable them to perform such things ; but they now doubted of the fulfilment of these promises, and thought the object of them too difficult to be accomplished. Christ, therefore, justly calls them a perverse as well as faithless generation, because they doubted of promises upon which they ought to have relied. How long shall I be with you ? i. e. how long will you have occasion for my presence and assistance ? Jesus reproves his disciples, because they could not give relief to the afflicted, unless while he was present, and helping them. How long shall I endure you ? how long shall I bear, with a patient mind, your perverse manners ? This language is severe, and, on that account, some commentators have supposed it was intended for the Pharisees, or the father of the young man, and his friends. The narrative directs us to apply it to the disciples of Jesus : for in the twentieth verse, Christ tells them that they were unable to perform the cure on account of their unbelief. Those who enjoyed such advantages for acquiring a strong faith, as the disciples of Jesus, are deservedly reprehended with severity for the want of it.

18. And Jesus rebuked the dæmon, and he departed out of him ; and the child was cured from that very hour, "*that moment.*"

It has been said that Christ's rebuking the dæmon, evidently supposes that the being whom he addresses was capable of obeying him, and that he expected him to obey him, from a conviction and awe of his divine authority. To this objection to the opinion that possessions are bodily distempers, two answers have been made. 1. That it was no unusual thing with our Saviour to address the elements, and other objects equally insensible, as agents, endowed with reason and liberty : to the dead, Jesus said, Arise : he rebuked the winds and the seas, saying, Peace, be still ; and lastly, he

rebuked a fever, and it left the patient. Why then might he not rebuke a *dæmon*, even supposing "*dæmon*" to stand merely for the disorder imputed to his influence, and speak in the same tone of authority to it as to other things, equally incapable of a voluntary obedience? But, 2. to account for the language of Christ in regard to *dæmoniacs*, some have supposed that he was endowed with every degree of knowledge necessary to accomplish the important purposes of his divine mission: but that in regard to the causes of natural distempers, and other subjects of natural philosophy, which had no connexion with his business as a religious instructor, God did not think proper to reveal to him more than to others, but that he was left to form the same opinion as the Jews among whom he lived. As they considered madness and epilepsy as arising from an evil being, occupying the body of the afflicted, Jesus thought and spake in the same manner: sometimes rebuking them, commanding them to go out, and to depart.

19. Then came the disciples to Jesus, apart, and said, Why could we not cast him out?

20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Christ does not mean that their faith should be as small as a grain of mustard-seed: but as thriving and increasing: for it is said in another place, from the smallest of all seeds to become the greatest among herbs, and even a tree.

"Ye shall say unto this mountain," &c. This language is to be understood figuratively, and not literally: the meaning of it is, that by a strong faith they should be enabled to work much greater miracles than those which they had hitherto performed; which was in fact the case. When Christ says that nothing should be impossible to his disciples, if they had a strong faith, his words must be limited to the subject of which he is speaking: there is nothing which you shall not be able to do, of those things which may confirm your doctrine, and procure respect to your office.

21. Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*

Christ had before shown how *dæmoniacs* might be cured; namely, by a strong faith: he now shows them that this faith is not easily obtained, but must be wrought in the mind by prayer and fasting, that is, by fervent devotion, such as men practise when they fast. The Divine Being did not choose to grant the power of working miracles to those who doubted his ability to perform them, because this would be granting a favour to one in the very

* This whole verse is wanting in the Vatican and another MS. and in the Coptic, Æthiopic, and one of the Syriac versions.

act of dishonouring him ; and the more difficult the miracles were, under which description the disciples would rank casting out dæmons, the more likely were such doubts to arise ; but solemn addresses to the Divine Being were calculated to remove them, by reviving in the mind just apprehensions of his perfections.

22. And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The son of man shall be betrayed, “*delivered,*” (*i. e. by God,*) into the hands of men ;

23. And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.

This is the second time that Jesus warns his disciples of his approaching sufferings. He found that his former declarations upon this subject were hardly credited by them, and that it was necessary they should be renewed. On this occasion, however, his words seem to have made a deeper impression : for we are told that they were exceeding sorry at the prospect of his death, and of the manner in which he was to die.

24. And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute-money, came to Peter and said, Doth not your master pay tribute ?

This was not a tax paid to the Romans, but a small sum, of about one shilling and two-pence of our money, collected by the priests from every Jew of twenty years of age and upwards, to support the daily expenses of the temple, in sacrifices, frankincense, wood, show-bread, and other things. As it was not exacted by force, it is probable that many declined to pay it : the collectors, therefore, only asked whether Jesus used to pay it.

25. He saith, Yes ; and when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, “*spoke first,*” saying, What thinkest thou, Simon ? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute ; of their own children or of strangers ?

26. Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.

From the conduct of earthly kings towards their own children, Christ drew an argument for exempting himself, who was the Son of God, the king of heaven, from paying tribute ; and his argument is this : If kings do not oblige children of their own family to pay taxes, but their subjects, I, who stand in the relation of a son to God, ought to be free from this burthen. Strangers here signify not foreigners, but those not related to kings, in opposition to their children.

27. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, *by appearing to despise the temple,* go thou to the sea,

and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth thou shalt find a piece of money ; that take and give unto them for me and thee.

The Greek word is *Stater*, or two shillings and four-pence farthing of our money. The language of Christ intimates that it was known to him, that such a piece of money was in this fish's mouth.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the conduct of Christ towards his disciples we may learn much useful instruction. When he observed their want of faith in the divine power, after seeing so many illustrious proofs of it in his own miracles, he does not palliate or excuse their fault ; but reproves them with warmth and indignation. This he knew would fill them with shame for their past backwardness, awaken their attention to the cause of it, and rouse their exertions to remove it. We accordingly perceive that it had this effect : for we find them inquiring immediately whence their fault had proceeded, and how it might be prevented on future occasions.

With the same sincerity let us act towards our friends, when they fail in their duty, or appear to do wrong. Let us set before them their faults in strong but just colours ; every instance of error, weakness, or negligence in their conduct : every thing by which they degrade or injure themselves, or bring dishonour upon the religion which they profess ; and let us address them with a warmth which shall discover the deep concern we feel for their failings, and the earnest desire we have to promote their happiness. Such freedom is the best proof we can give them of our affection, and the most likely means of reforming their conduct, and of securing their esteem. Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Remember the maxim of the wise man : “ open rebuke is better than secret love : for faithful are the wounds of a friend. He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his tongue.” The propriety of these maxims is confirmed by the conduct of the disciples towards their Master : for we find that they held him in the highest honour, and regarded him with the tenderest affection, notwithstanding his frequent and severe reproofs : when he mentioned to them his death, soon after this event, they were overwhelmed with sorrow at the prospect of losing him : nor shall we suffer, in the esteem of those whose good opinion is of any value, by practising the same freedom and sincerity.

Another proof which Christ gives his disciples of his affection, is by warning them of approaching trials and difficulties. Had he told them that he should always remain with them, or flattered them with the hope that they should live in ease, and enjoy great prosperity, he would have afforded them some present pleasure ; or

had he only been silent in regard to the evils which awaited both himself and them, he would have saved them from many painful apprehensions: yet, as this would only increase their future trial, he thought it better to inform them of their real situation, that by having before them the prospect of trouble, they might better fortify their minds to support it. In like manner, if our friends find it necessary to warn us of the evils which lie before us, let us not regard them as enemies, because they give us pain, but consider them as acting the part of true friends.

2. We have here striking examples both of the riches and of the poverty of Christ; of his riches, in being able to procure money whenever he pleased; and of his poverty, in being obliged to have recourse to a miracle, in order to furnish himself with so trifling a sum, as that which this tribute amounted to. This affords us a complete proof of his disinterestedness: had he been desirous to amass wealth, he had an opportunity of doing it. Those whose health he had restored from painful illness, or whose limbs he had made whole, would certainly have been glad to testify their gratitude for these important favours, by bestowing upon him no small portion of their worldly substance; but Christ declined to receive the valuable presents, which, no doubt, they offered him; and chose to remain in the same humble condition, lest they should imagine that he was actuated by a love of gain. But although he would not receive valuable gifts from men, it might be supposed that he could not have the same objection to accept them from God, when they were conferred upon him immediately by miracle; yet he would not employ this method of enriching himself, lest the extraordinary powers with which he was furnished might be considered as the instruments of private convenience: and not, what they were intended to be, the evidences of a divine mission. Thus we see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, although he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich in all the blessings of the gospel. Let us learn from his example, to act the same disinterested part in the world, whenever it is necessary for promoting the happiness of mankind: let us be content with that degree of worldly good which we can acquire by just and honourable means, and reject with disdain all unfair methods of becoming rich. We see how little necessary wealth is to our comfort and usefulness: had it been indispensable to the enjoyment of true happiness, God would certainly have bestowed it upon his Son and favourite, who merited the highest gifts at his hand. What he is left without cannot be of any great value; or, at least, the want of it may be supplied in some other way. Who is there that hath done more for the good of mankind than Christ, or acquired more lasting fame? Yet he had not the advantage of riches for this purpose, but ranks with the poorest of the human race. Let us not, therefore, estimate our own usefulness, or that of those around us, by the degree of wealth which we may possess, but by the services which we render to our fellow-creatures.

SECTION XLII.

Christ exhorts his disciples to humility by the example of little children.

MATTHEW xviii. 1—14.

1. AT the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ?

What seems to have given occasion to this dispute was the distinction which Christ had just shown to some of his disciples, above the rest ; telling Peter that he gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven ; and taking with him Peter, James, and John to the mount of transfiguration, while the rest were left behind. These marks of preference excited jealousy in the breasts of the other apostles, and induced them to assert their own claim to pre-eminence ; but as they could not settle the value of their respective claims among themselves, they referred the matter to Jesus. By the kingdom of heaven they understood a temporal kingdom, of which the Messiah was to be the prince, and where there were to be various officers under him ; and they wished to know who would have the most honourable post ; he who first believed in him ; who was most closely connected with him by blood ; who most frequently entertained him at his house ; or who was most advanced in age.

2. And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

It was usual with teachers in the east to instruct by symbolical actions, or by referring to visible objects : to this latter method Christ has here recourse. The child whom he calls, although very young, was several years old, as he was able to walk, in obedience to his call.

3. And said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, “ *except ye turn,*” and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The pursuit of honour is not the employment of children, but of men, who have passed the season of youth. Christ would, therefore, have his disciples to be like children, in modesty and contempt of worldly honours : if they possess not this temper, they are so far from being entitled to the highest posts in his kingdom, that they will not enjoy the lowest place.

4. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself, as

this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

He who imitates this little child in humility, in thinking modestly concerning himself, in suffering himself to be treated with contempt, without painful mortification, in not eagerly pursuing high titles and external dignities, is a Christian of the first eminence. He excels others in knowledge ; because he justly thinks that true dignity is not founded upon titles and external distinctions ; and in virtuous inclinations ; because he seeks not a vain glory and perishing honours : he is not himself elated with the titles and honours which he may enjoy, nor does he despise those who want them.

5. And whoso shall receive one such little child, *i. e. one resembling a child in disposition*, in my name, *as my disciple*, receiveth me.

To receive a person, in Scripture-language, signifies to entertain him at one's house. As this was a common instance of benevolence, it is here put for any act of kindness ; and Christ declares that whosoever shows any favour to a humble Christian, although despised by others, confers a favour upon himself, and shall consequently be rewarded by him. He had in the preceding verse commended the humble ; now he commends those who respect them. The dispositions of both are nearly connected : for those who are humble themselves, love and admire humility in others ; but those who are ambitious of honour, respect none except those who are distinguished by it.

6. But whoso shall offend, "*cause to sin*," one of these little ones, *these lowly disciples*, which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned, "*that it should be plunged*," in the depth of the sea.

To inflict death by fastening a large stone, such as was used for grinding corn in mills, about the neck of the criminal, and throwing it into the sea, was a punishment practised not by the Jews, but by the Syrians and Greeks. To a more grievous evil will he expose himself, in the opinion of Christ, who, by his pride and ambition, shall cause any disciple of Jesus, not sufficiently confirmed in his religion, to abandon it. Hence Christ takes occasion to warn men in general, of the danger of leading others, by any means, to transgress their duty.

7. Wo unto the world, because of offences, "*temptations* ;" for it must needs be that temptations come : but wo to that man by whom the temptation cometh.

I know that such is the depravity of mankind, that men will, by their solicitations or evil actions, tempt others to do wrong.

This will prove a dreadful calamity to both parties, but principally to him who is the cause of temptation : for besides committing sin himself, he induces others to do so, and hereby brings upon himself double guilt.

8. Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, "*be leading thee to sin,*" cut them off, and cast them from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, "*lame or without a limb,*" rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.

The language of Christ in this verse is proverbial, and may be compared with that which he uses, Matt. v. 29. By a hand or a foot, we are to understand something as dear to us as a hand or a foot, or other member of our bodies. He is exhorting men to free themselves from those things which may tempt them to sin, and his argument, when fully expressed, will stand thus : " As the most valuable members of our bodies are to be cut off, in order to save the rest of the body, how much more reasonable is it to banish from our minds evil inclinations, however dear to us, than, by cherishing them, to expose ourselves to extreme misery !"

9. And if thine eye be leading thee to sin, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire.

The sentiment contained in this verse is exactly the same as was intended to be conveyed by the former ; but a fresh comparison is made use of, in order to impress it more strongly upon the mind.

10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, *i. e. any one of my disciples* : for I say unto you, that in heaven, their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.

It was the opinion of the Jews that every good man, if not every man, had a guardian angel, who was continually employed in taking care of him, and in conveying benefits to him. Christ, therefore, who always spoke to the Jews in the way in which he was most likely to be understood by them, had recourse to this notion, to express to them, how much those lowly persons of whom he had been speaking, were the objects of divine protection and favour. Their angels, *i. e.* those appointed to guard them, hold the highest place of honour in heaven : for they are admitted to the presence of God. The phrase, *behold the face of my Father*, is taken from the custom of kings in the east, who did not permit every one of their officers to see them every day, but granted this honour to the chief ministers only. To behold the face of a king continually, therefore, is to be his familiar and intimate friend. Hence, to

behold the face of God always, comes to signify to enjoy his peculiar favour.

11. For the son of man is come to save that which is lost.

Jesus here mentions another reason why Christians, however lowly in their own esteem, should not be despised; namely, that God had sent him, the Messiah, to save them; which he would not have done, unless he had thought every individual of great value. By that which was lost we are to understand those who, after the manner of sheep, have wandered. The joy which the Divine Being feels, from recovering only one from this state, Christ illustrates by the following beautiful parable.

12. How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray?

13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

14. Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

In these last words, which contain the meaning of the parable, more is included than seems to be expressed: for the idea intended to be conveyed is not merely that God is unwilling that any Christian should perish; but that he is highly grieved at the prospect, and experiences the utmost joy when he is recovered, as the shepherd does when he finds the lost sheep.

REFLECTIONS.

1. LET Christians learn from this passage, how much it is their duty to cultivate a spirit of humility. It is excellent in itself, and it gives grace and beauty to every other virtue: it is necessary to entitle us to the character of the disciples of Christ: without it we are unworthy of the name: we do not deserve the lowest place in the kingdom of Christ upon earth, and shall not find admittance into the kingdom of God in heaven. Let us check the first rising of pride and ambition in our hearts, when we know that if cherished, they will prove our ruin: let us labour to convince ourselves of the vanity of all worldly honours, whether they arise from sounding titles, from great fame, or from any other distinction: let us especially take care that we do not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Whatever talents or virtues or worldly honours we possess, let us remember that we are indebted to God

for them. Having thus received them from another, let us not boast as though we had not received them.

How unbecoming does it appear in the apostles, who were to teach others their duty, and ought to have set an example of it in their own conduct, to be contending among themselves which of them should be the greatest! Justly are they reprehended by Christ's placing a child before them: for in a child there is much to shame the pride of man. Yet, notwithstanding this reproof, the contention, although stopped for the present, was renewed on future occasions; nor has it been confined to the apostles; it has been the disgrace of the ministers of Christ in all ages of the church, but more especially in latter times, when the violence of the contest has been increased by those artificial distinctions and titles which have been introduced among them by human policy.

How much, alas, has the peace of the world been disturbed by these struggles for superiority, and how many have been disgusted with Christianity itself, from observing the indecent behaviour of those who profess to teach it! If they value the peace of the church, the credit of their religion, or the salvation of men's souls, let the ministers of the gospel be careful to remove such stumbling-blocks from the way of their brethren.

2. Let us learn to submit to every kind of mortification and self-denial which our duty may require, upon the principle which Christ here suggests—that it is wise to submit to a less evil, in order to avoid a greater. When tempted to indulge our passions beyond the bounds which religion prescribes, let us remember that it must be at the expense of much greater happiness hereafter: that for a short, momentary gratification, we must submit to ages of excruciating torment; and ask ourselves, whether we can deem this a wise and proper choice. Whereas, if we deny ourselves a little present pleasure in performing our duty, our loss will be repaid with a store of endless pleasure in heaven. With such prospects before us, we need not hesitate what to do.

3. How amiable is the view here given us of the compassion of the Divine Being towards the human race! Every sheep that wanders from his fold is the object of his pity, and there are no pains which he is not willing to take, in order to recover it. If other shepherds, sent out for this purpose, cannot bring them back, he will send to them his Son; and if he succeed in recovering one, our Father in heaven experiences the highest joy. He seems to forget that he has other sheep, who have not wandered, while he rejoices for that which has returned. Let us learn to admire and adore the benevolence of the divine nature, which sets so much value upon our happiness, and employs such expensive methods to promote it. Let us praise him, who so loved the world as to send his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

SECTION XLIII.

*Conduct to be observed towards those who trespass against us.
Parable of the king reckoning with his servants.*

MATTHEW xviii. 15—35.

15. MOREOVER, if thy brother, *one of the same religion as thyself*, shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault, between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

The trespasses to which Christ here refers, are injuries, which may be done us through the weakness of human nature, from passion, envy, or covetousness : when these arise, he would have us to be more concerned to convince the person who has committed them, of his fault, than to obtain redress. To do this with success we must not reprove him for it publicly, lest we hereby inflame his passions ; but we ought to show the utmost tenderness to his feelings and his reputation, by reminding him of the injury which he has done us, in private, where no one can be a witness of his disgrace but ourselves. If he listen to our admonition, and repent of his fault, we have accomplished what ought to be our principal design ; we have saved a fellow-creature from that ruin which he would have brought upon himself by a crime unrepented of. There is a precept in the Mosaic law, which in its spirit and tendency greatly resembles this. Lev. xix. 17, “Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.” Language, very like to what Christ here uses, is also found in the Jewish writers ; nor can we wonder that Christ, who freely reproves the faults of the Jews, should sometimes adopt their language, where it is founded upon the principles of wisdom and benevolence, and calculated to do good.

16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

If thou fail to convince him of his fault, by reasoning with him thyself, it is very probable that he will acknowledge that he has done wrong, when he finds that his conduct is condemned by disinterested persons, whose judgment and integrity he has been accustomed to respect : such persons do thou take with thee, to admonish him a second time, when the first admonition has been unsuccessful. By a rule of the Jewish law, no one could be convicted of a crime by the testimony of a single witness ; but there must be two, at least, for this purpose. Hence “two or three witnesses” came to be a proverbial expression for competent and satisfactory evidence. It is to this law that our Lord alludes in this passage.

17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen-man and a publican.

By *the church*, Christ here means the religious community of which the persons to whom he addressed himself were members; this to the Jews, would be the synagogue: and to Christians, the separate societies into which they were formed for public worship. To them the case was to be referred, when other methods of reclaiming the offender failed, with the hope that the concurring judgment of a great number of persons, in condemning his conduct, would convince him that it was reprehensible, and induce him to acknowledge his fault. If, however, he still persisted in maintaining that he had done right, and despised these repeated admonitions, Christians were then to be freed from all further concern for his reformation, and were to behave towards him as the Jews acted towards heathens, or those of their own countrymen who were considered as flagitious characters; i. e. they were to avoid all friendly intercourse with him. We are not, however, to deny to such a person the common offices of humanity, as many of the Jews did to publicans and heathens: but only to withdraw from him every mark of particular friendship.

18. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

If any despise the sentence which you shall pass concerning him, agreeably to the rules which I have given you, it will be at his peril: for he whom you exclude from your society, on account of the injuries which he has committed, shall be deprived of the favour of God; but he whom you admit again to your society, upon the profession of repentance, shall be pardoned by God. Both the impunity which you grant to those who return, and your severity towards the disobedient, shall be ratified in heaven.

The meaning of the phrase “binding and loosing” has been explained above when applied by our Lord to Peter: chap. xvi. 19.

19. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

What Christ had just declared to be true in a particular case he now declares to be true in general. He had been saying, that what they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven; i. e. that the persons whom, upon the profession of repentance, they forgave, and admitted into their society again, should likewise, at their request, be forgiven by God: he now declares, that if there were any thing else, for promoting reformation of manners, or advanc-

ing true religion in the world, which they should concur in asking of God, it should be granted. It seems as if the words were not to be interpreted literally, and that they only mean that union in a good cause is so acceptable to the Divine Being, that there is no favour which he is not ready to grant to persons who practise it.

20. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

The name of Christ is often put for his religion. To be gathered together, therefore, in the name of Christ, is to meet for the purpose of promoting his religion. Those who assembled together with this view, however few they might be in number, might be assured that their prayers and other services would have the same force as if he himself were among them. There seems to be nothing in this passage, to countenance the idea that Christ is personally present, in every place where his followers assemble.

21. Then came Peter to him, and said, Master, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? "*How many times, if my brother offend against me, must I forgive him?*" till seven times?

Peter's question was probably founded upon a tradition of the Jews, that it was right to forgive a person who had offended, seven times, but not oftener. In Luke (xvii. 3,) it is not seven times simply, but seven times a day. Christ, however, tells him, that this was not sufficient.

22. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven, *i. e. without any limits.*

A condition upon which pardon is to be bestowed, is plainly implied here, and expressly mentioned by Luke, (xvii. 4,) when reciting the same conversation; and that is, that the offender repent of his fault.

The forgiveness of injuries may be of two sorts, and consists either in subduing all malice, and in abstaining from all retaliation and revenge against the offender; which is what we owe to all men, although they persist in the same injurious behaviour; or in restoring the offender to the same state of favour as he was in before; which is due only to him who repents. It is this kind of forgiveness of which Christ here speaks.

Lest any one should think this rule, of repeating forgiveness upon a repetition of the offence, severe and unreasonable, Christ here shows by a parable how equitable it is.

23. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

The meaning of which is this, that God's dealing with men under the Christian dispensation, is like that of a king, who would reckon with his servants.

24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents.

This sum is put for the greatest debt which it was possible to contract.

25. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

When a debtor was unable to discharge his debts, the Jews permitted him to be sold for a slave, together with his wife and children, as appears from 2 Kings, iv. 1, where we are told that a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried unto Elisha, saying, "Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord, and the creditor is come, to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen." The king, therefore, proposed to do, in this instance, no more than what was usually practised, and what the law authorized.

26. The servant, therefore, fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

That is, remitted the payment of it to another time: for this was all that he desired of him.

28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence,* and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came, and told unto their master all that was done.

* £3. 4s. 7d. sterling.

32. Then his master, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant ! I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me :

33. Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had compassion on thee ?

34. And his master was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, "*jailors*," till he should pay all that was due unto him.

The keepers of prisons were tormentors, whenever there was occasion for tortures ; but they were not always so employed.

35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

That is, In the like circumstances : if you forgive them not, when they turn unto you, and repent, and beseech you to have compassion on them. This parable is so plain, as not to need any comment.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the passage which has been read, we may learn the best method of administering reproof for injuries received, and what ought to be our principal design in giving it : not so much to obtain redress for ourselves, as to make the offender sensible of his fault : not to give him pain, for the sake of giving pain, but in order to reclaim. The injury we suffer by his injustice is but a temporary inconvenience, which may be soon repaired, or easily borne if it should not admit of a remedy : but the injury which he has done to himself, by transgressing a divine law, is of a more serious and lasting nature, affecting his future happiness, and exposing him to the wrath of God in the world to come. One who has brought himself to this dreadful condition, calls for the compassion of every one who has any portion of humanity left in his breast, and who is concerned for the eternal welfare of a fellow-creature : he that shall rescue him from it will perform a worthy exploit : he will gain a brother : he will save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins. To accomplish so important an object, we may well forget trifling injuries, and undertake the disagreeable office of reprovers. In exercising this difficult office let us restrain our passions, and proceed with caution and prudence ; not having recourse to harsh language, or to severe treatment, which will only tend to inflame the passions of the offender, and make him disregard the wisest admonitions ; but addressing him with that mildness and tenderness which a benevolent concern for his welfare will dictate, and which is the most likely means of opening

his mind to reason. Let us particularly take care that we do not expose men's faults to the world, before we have tried to correct them in private. Such is the benevolent method in which Christ directs us to administer reproof, and such is the motive by which he encourages us to give it : but very different from this is the general conduct of men, who, if they suffer injuries or perceive faults, are ready enough to admonish and reprove, but do it only to gratify their passions, and not to produce reformation ; and therefore deliver it at that time and in that language which is most likely to wound the feelings, or injure the reputation of the offender.

2. It is the duty of individuals and of societies of men to discountenance those who persist in unjust or disorderly behaviour. If a brother, who has offended against us or any other person, will not listen to our admonition, or to that of the religious society to which he belongs, so as to reform his conduct, we are to treat him as a heathen and a publican,—to have no familiar intercourse with him. If this method of behaviour towards wicked men were more generally adopted, it would have a very salutary effect, by correcting many vices in which Christians indulge themselves, and by preventing many more : but the obligation under which we are laid to perform this duty is either not attended to, or men are averse to comply with it ; perhaps on account of the extravagant length to which it has been frequently carried. Christian churches, at the present day in particular, are very negligent in regard to this subject, and to that neglect we must attribute those disorders which prevail among them, and by which they are so much disgraced and injured. The apostles and first Christians were more attentive to these rules of discipline which Christ has given us ; and among them there were but few immoralities, or they were soon corrected : “if any man obey not the will of God,” says the apostle, “note that man, and have no communion with him, that he may be ashamed ; yet account him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” This direction was observed in their churches : for we find him saying, on another occasion ; “sufficient to such a man,” *i. e.* the incestuous person, “is his punishment, which was inflicted of many ;” meaning the church. The business of reproof, whether it be private or public, is extremely painful to a compassionate mind ; but it is necessary and salutary. When Christians associate together, however few in number, for discountenancing vice and immorality, and for encouraging obedience to the laws of their Master, Christ is present with them, in heart if not in person, and their decisions are ratified in heaven.

3. How odious appears the conduct of the servant, who rigorously enforced the immediate payment of a small debt, after he had been forgiven one that was infinitely greater ! A noble example of generosity, by which he was so much benefited, had no influence upon him. His heart was hardened against the sufferings of the unfortunate ; his ears were deaf to the cries of the wretched. Let him have judgment without mercy, who has showed no mercy ! So we are ready to pronounce ; but let us remember, that in condemning such a person, we are passing a sentence upon ourselves, if we are not ready to forgive, from our hearts, without

retaining any rancour or malice against them, those who ask our forgiveness, and are sorry that they have offended. While, therefore, we show just severity towards the obstinate, let us manifest the greatest tenderness and compassion to the penitent.

SECTION XLIV.

Christ discourses concerning the lawfulness of divorce.

MATTHEW xix. 1—15.

1. AND it came to pass that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judæa, beyond, “*by the side of,*” Jordan.

As Jesus was now travelling from Galilee, which lay in the north of Palestine, to Jerusalem, which lay in the south, it is probable that he would take the nearest course, by going on this side the river Jordan, along the banks of that river: accordingly, we find that he passed through Jericho, which lay in that direction.

2. And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

3. The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, “*trying him,*” and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

This, it seems, was a matter warmly debated at this time among the Jewish doctors: some of them maintaining, from Deut. xxiv. 1, that a wife might only be dismissed on account of her having violated the marriage covenant by committing adultery: others interpreting the passage as if divorces were allowed in the case of lighter offences, and even where the manners of the wife did not please the husband. These were the grounds of difference on this subject in the Jewish schools. The Pharisees wished to make trial of the wisdom of Christ, by asking his opinion respecting this controversy; hoping that he would say something which would betray ignorance, or expose him to odium, by deciding contrary to the opinion of the doctors and many of the people.

4. And he answered, and said unto them, Have ye not read that he which made them, “*the Creator,*” at the beginning made them male and female?

You appeal to the law of Moses to decide this question, but I refer you to an older and better rule, the constitution of human nature in a state of innocence in Paradise. Since God has created mankind of different sexes, with mutual desires for each other's

society, it is plain that he intended they should live together in perpetual friendship.

5. And said, *i. e. not God, but the Scripture*, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they twain, “*two*,” shall be one flesh, “*one person*.”

If this society is so agreeable to a man, that for the sake of it he will desert the most intimate connexions in life, not excepting his parents, with whom he has lived from his birth ; and if it unite two persons so closely together, that they appear to be but one in intention and affection, it was certainly intended by Providence not to be temporary, but perpetual.

6. Wherefore, they are no more two, but one person. What, therefore, God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

Those, therefore, whom God, by the affections which he has implanted in the breast of each, has made provision for uniting so closely to one another, that they shall appear to be but one person, and who are hereby capable of communicating so much happiness to each other, ought not to be separated for light reasons : as a man would not think of cutting off a limb of his body, from which he received occasionally slight pain or inconvenience. There are other arguments against divorces for trifling causes, which our Lord does not think it necessary to notice ; particularly, the education of their common children, for the due accomplishment of which the joint endeavours of both parents are usually necessary, and which must, therefore, be greatly injured by a separation.

7. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away ?

If divorce be contrary to the intentions of Providence, as you seem to affirm, how came Moses to authorize it by an express law ? By calling the law of Moses upon this subject a command, the Pharisees meant to intimate that he forbade them to live with a bad wife, even if they were willing, whereas, all that can be inferred from what the Jewish lawgiver has said is, that divorce is sometimes allowable, in order to prevent a greater evil.

8. He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives ; but from the beginning it was not so.

By the hardness of their hearts, Christ means the cruel, stubborn temper of their ancestors, to whom the law was first delivered. This, especially when connected with those high notions of the superior rights of the man to those of the woman which prevailed in those early times, was so great, that if Moses had not permitted divorce, in some other cases besides that of adultery, the consequences would often have been fatal to the wife ; the husband be-

ing induced to put her to death, in order to disengage himself from a disagreeable connexion, or to treat her with such severity, as would render her life extremely wretched. To prevent these evils, Moses prudently permitted, not commanded, a separation of the parties. This was the best law which could be made for men in their circumstances ; but it was not the best which civil society admitted, nor that which God designed from the beginning.—This permission, therefore, did not exempt those from guilt who had recourse to it.

9. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery ; and whoso marrieth her which is put away, doth commit adultery.

It is to be remembered that Christ is not here laying down civil laws for public communities : these he left every state to settle for itself, as it might think proper ; but he is delivering precepts which are to bind the consciences of his followers. He decides in favour of those Jewish doctors who thought that a man was not to put away his wife except for the cause of adultery ; although he admits that Moses permitted it in other cases. To divorce a wife for any other reason, was to cause her to commit adultery ; by which Christ means that a man, by branding her with the ignominy of a divorce, would prevent her from marrying another husband, and induce her, after losing the hope of honourable marriage, to seek some irregular connexion, which is sometimes denominated by the word which we here render adultery. The guilt of such a criminal connexion is to be imputed to the man by whom she is unjustly divorced ; or, if she should have virtue enough to live soberly afterwards, yet the man who puts her away is justly chargeable with all the evil consequences which are likely to arise from his severity. “And whoso marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery.” This is to be understood of men who received those who were divorced, for their wives, without taking any pains first to reconcile them to their former husbands ; or of those who acted in a manner still more criminal, who instigated married women to behave in such a manner towards their husbands, as they knew would provoke a divorce, that they might have an opportunity of marrying them afterwards. Compare the note on Matthew v. 32.

10. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.

If a man is bound to his wife for life, and must bear with all the other defects and irregularities of her temper and conduct, except adultery, it is better not to marry.

11. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.

None are capable of that, i. e. of abstaining from marriage, of which the disciples had just been speaking, except those whose

natural constitution was so framed by God, as to be able to bear this abstinence.

12. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

I find these two verses thus paraphrased. "What you propose, in order to avoid the inconveniences attending a marriage-state, when there happens not to be a thorough good-liking between the parties, namely, not to marry at all, is more than can be expected of all persons, though it is so with respect to some: for some have little or no inclination to marriage, and therefore may be said, in a figurative sense, to be eunuchs from their mother's womb; as others are actually made eunuchs by the wanton cruelty of men; while others, like myself, will devote themselves to a single life, in order to be free from worldly incumbrances, and to devote themselves more entirely to the service of religion; which, though not generally adviseable, may be expedient in times of persecution. In this case let every person act as he shall find himself able to do, and as he shall judge to be best upon the whole."*

13. Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

Some persons, observing how effectual the prayers of Christ were in curing all manner of diseases, thought they would have the same efficacy in preventing them, and therefore brought children to Jesus, that he might pray over them. Laying on of hands was a common ceremony among the Jews, whenever the divine blessing was implored for any person. Thus we read that Jacob placed his hands upon the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh, when he prayed that God would bless the lads, Gen. xlviii. 14.—In the same manner Moses laid his hands upon Joshua, when he implored the divine blessing upon him as his successor. The conversation which the disciples were holding with their Master concerning marriage, was agreeable and interesting to them: it is not unlikely that they had some curious questions to propose to him in their minds; they were therefore displeased to find themselves thus unseasonably, as they imagined, interrupted.

14. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Of persons resembling these children in disposition, modest and easily receiving instruction, does my church, or kingdom in this world consist. Children are not, therefore to be treated with

* Dr. Priestley's Harmony, p. 159.

neglect; they possess many amiable qualities, which men must cultivate, if they wish to attain true excellence.

15. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

His laying on of his hands was the external sign that he secretly prayed over them.

REFLECTIONS.

1. If the marriage contract be indissoluble, except in the case of adultery, as there are many other circumstances which may render the continuance of it grievous, there are two duties which necessarily arise from this consideration. The first is, caution in entering upon it, that men do not form alliances with those whose vices and irregularities of behaviour may render their lives wretched, and tempt them to repent of their engagements. The other is, to avoid every thing which may render those unhappy with whom they are associated: for this is to consult their own comfort, as well as that of their companions. Let nothing be done by either party, which may cause unnecessary pain, or create disgust; let there be a mutual endeavour to ease each other's burthens, and to comply with each other's wishes. If offences should arise, let them avoid harsh language, which stirs up passions and engenders strife; severe treatment, which discovers hardness of heart in the party which indulges in it, and alienates the affections: let them not cherish resentment for supposed injuries or affronts, but discover a readiness to be reconciled, and to forgive. These are rules which it is the interest of each to observe: for whoever transgresses them, will find that the evil he commits will return to him again: although they are two, they are but one flesh; their interests and their happiness are inseparable. "Husbands, then, love your wives, and be not bitter against them: let every one of you, in particular, love his wife, even as himself: for so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies: he that loveth his wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it." This is the advice and exhortation of one apostle upon the subject, and that of another is not unlike it; "husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge; giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the same grace of life." To the wives they both say, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord."

The frequency of divorce among us, for the cause of adultery, discovers the depravity of our morals, and shows how lightly men think of the duties of this important relation. The same observations may likewise be made upon the violent quarrels and implacable hatred which take place in other instances, where the connexion is not dissolved. Christians should remember that whatever allowances may be made to Jews, under an imperfect dispensation

of religion, the same indulgence will not be granted to them, who have been so much better instructed, when they come to give an account of their conduct at the last day.

2. The conduct of our Lord towards children is a proof of the benevolence of his temper, and of the excellence of human nature. Were this nature so depraved as some have represented it to be; were men born into the world under the wrath and curse of the Almighty, and liable to all the punishment of hell in the earliest period of life, Christ would not have entertained so favourable an opinion of children, nor have behaved towards them with so much attention: he would not on this occasion have declared that we must become children in disposition, before we can enter his kingdom, nor have recommended their temper as fit for his disciples to imitate, as we find him doing in another instance. Such a representation of the original state of human nature as I have just mentioned, is at open variance with the language and conduct of our divine Master. If we could suppose it to be true, it would be a high reflection both upon the wisdom and goodness of that Being who is the author of human nature, and have an unfavourable influence upon the happiness of society, by discouraging a benevolent attention to a tender age, which stands peculiarly in need of assistance. My brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit, in malice be ye children; but in understanding be men.

SECTION XLV.

Jesus discourses with a rich young man, who had inquired the way to eternal life.

MATTHEW xix. 16—30.

16. AND, behold, one came, and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

This person was a young man, as we learn from the twentieth verse, and invested with some public authority: for Luke (xviii. 18,) calls him a ruler. Having heard Jesus speak in the plainest manner of a future life, which was taught only imperfectly by the Jewish doctors, he came to him, to inquire how he might obtain it. By the appellation of good, we must suppose he meant best, most excellent; the positive degree being put for the superlative. This language, when accompanied with the action of kneeling showed that he considered Christ as more than an ordinary man.

17. And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.

Why callest thou me the best of masters? this language is only applicable to God, who alone deserves to be called absolutely per-

fect. Having thus corrected the error into which the young man had fallen, in his words and manner of address, he proceeds to answer his question.

But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

As to the relative duties, which are necessary to obtain eternal happiness, concerning which thou inquirest, and not concerning other doctrines, which lead to the way of salvation, thou canst learn nothing from me but what God has already taught thee. Christ had indeed explained the laws of morality more accurately and fully than had been done before; yet the rules of goodness and justice contained in the books of Moses and in the prophets were not abolished by the gospel; nor had he given any new precepts.

18. He saith unto him, Which ?

As the law of Moses contained many commandments, he wished to know to which he was to pay particular attention, and the answer of Christ shows that the moral laws, containing the duties we owe to each other, and not the ceremonial, are to be principally regarded.

Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder : thou shalt not commit adultery : thou shalt not steal : thou shalt not bear false witness :

19. Honour thy father and thy mother ; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

This last is not found in the ten commandments, as the others are ; yet it is found in the law of Moses.

20. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up : what lack I yet ?

Having observed these precepts from the earliest part of life, he wished to know whether any thing further were necessary to complete his character. When he gave this account of himself, he hoped to have been commended by Jesus.

21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go, and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor ; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, and follow me.

The duties which I have just mentioned are the indispensable condition of enjoying everlasting happiness ; but if you wish to be perfect, and to do something of an excellent and extraordinary nature, sell your estate, and give all the produce of it to the poor ; that, freeing your mind from all concern about worldly affairs, you may attend my instructions, and yourself become a preacher of the gospel. You will thus obtain an ample reward in heaven. Christ

bids him sell his estate, not as a thing that was necessary to his salvation, but as a proof of the perfection of his character, and as what was at that time necessary, in order to his becoming a preacher of the gospel : for it was impossible to apply to this work with sufficient attention of mind, without being disencumbered of the world.

22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful : for he had great possessions.

He hoped to have been directed to do something which he could have easily performed ; but to give all his property to the poor, and to reduce himself to a distressed and afflicted condition, in the cause of truth and for the benefit of mankind, was a sacrifice which he was not prepared to make. He was too fond of riches, or of the honours and dignities which they afford, to part with them so easily : if this be the only road to perfection, he cannot attain it ; he goes away, therefore, disappointed and dejected.

23. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you that a rich man shall hardly enter, "*will hardly come,*" into the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of heaven here means, as in several other parts of the evangelists, the body of Christians. To come into this kingdom, therefore, is to become the disciple of Christ. Christ says that the rich are unwilling to do this : riches generally corrupted the manners, and made men averse to the pure precepts of the gospel, as a yoke which they were not able to bear. This aversion was further strengthened by the losses to which men in those times were exposed, by assuming the name of Christians. Two instances are mentioned in the gospel of rich men becoming the disciples of Christ : the one is Joseph of Arimathea, and the other Nicodemus ; but the difficulty which they felt in doing it, is evident in both cases : for the former was a disciple of Christ secretly, for fear of the Jews ; and the other, no doubt from the same motive, came to him by night ; but the young ruler, of whom we have here an account, had not resolution to do either the one thing or the other.

24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Some have supposed that instead of camel we ought to translate *cable-rope*, a signification which the word sometimes bears, and which seems more suitable to the connexion ; but our common translation accords very well with the language not only of the Hebrews, but likewise of the Arabs, with whom this comparison was a common proverb, to express any thing which was extremely difficult.

25. When his disciples heard it they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved ?

What rich man can come into the kingdom of God, and enter upon the way which leads to eternal salvation? The disciples were not aware at this time, whence the difficulty of rich men becoming Christians arose; because they had not hitherto been persecuted, and rather expected that all the rich and great would press in crowds into Christ's kingdom. They were, therefore, much surprised at this declaration of Christ.

26. But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

So many and powerful are the temptations to refuse to enter into my kingdom, and to reject the gospel, to which riches expose men, that, to human apprehension, it appears impossible that they should not reject it. God, however, who is able to do all things, can, from this gospel itself, or from any other source, furnish them with such strong motives to embrace it, as shall overcome all opposition, and induce some of the most wealthy of the human race to give up all they possess, for the sake of Christ and his religion.

27. Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold we have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall we have, therefore?

The two things which Christ required from the young man, Peter says had been done by himself and his fellow-disciples; they had forsaken all, and followed him: he presumes, therefore, to ask what reward they were to expect. They had forsaken their friends, their houses, and occupations, which were every thing to them.

23. And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The whole of this language is highly metaphorical. The regeneration here spoken of is not the change which shall take place in mankind after the general resurrection; but that which should be produced by the gospel of Christ in the present world: all mankind being regenerated by the principles and motives which it presents to them. Agreeably to this way of speaking, St. Paul says that "Christians are new creatures;" "old things are passed away: all things are become new." When this state of things arrived, Christ would sit upon the throne of his glory; that is, his authority being acknowledged, and his laws obeyed, he would attain the highest degree of honour, such as men obtain when they come to a throne. This honour his apostles should share with him: for they should be employed in propagating the Christian religion, and their precepts regarded as the rule of life, and next in point of authority to those of their Master. The twelve tribes of Israel are here put for the Jews, with reference to the apostles,

who were twelve in number ; and judging, which is an exercise of great power, for authority in general. Thus it was that the apostles would be rewarded : from them he proceeds to mention what would be the reward of his disciples in general.

29. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, "*from attachment to my religion,*" shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

Christ here speaks of the more excellent blessings and advantages which his followers would receive in the present world, in the place of what they might lose. This appears from the express words of Mark, (x. 30,) and from the last clause of the sentence, in which the reward of eternal life is mentioned, in addition to what had been said before. The construction of the passage is likewise illustrated by the event : for in the place of one house which they might lose, they had the free use of many houses : for a few brothers and sisters, an innumerable multitude of the disciples of Christ : for their children, as many as they converted to the faith, who regarded them as their fathers in Christ : for lands, all the wealth of Christians, which became common.

30. But many that are first shall be last ; and the last shall be first.

Many who are first with respect to advantages, like the Jews, will be the last to improve them ; and many who are last in this respect, as the Gentiles were, will distinguish themselves most by an early and zealous attachment to the gospel.

REFLECTIONS.

1. THE inquiries made by this young man are such as it is very proper for each of us to make for himself ; what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ? The object to be obtained is so extremely important and valuable, as to deserve our first and most serious concern. How we may get wealth or become great, are trifling inquiries, when compared with this ; it involves in it our most valuable interests, our eternal welfare. Yet how many are there of mankind, who never make this inquiry for themselves ; whose only concern it is to provide for the happiness of the present life, and who are as totally unconcerned about the next, as if they were to have no existence at all, or their happiness in it were secure ! Foolish and inconsiderate men ! to be so anxious for the enjoyments of a moment, and unconcerned about those of eternity ; to prefer the pleasures of sense to those of the mind ; the comforts of this life to the joys of heaven !

Have we, my brethren, neglected to make this inquiry ? then have we still the first step to take towards wisdom and happiness.

The most important business of life has been neglected : let us not defer it a moment longer, lest another opportunity of doing it should never occur.

If we have informed ourselves of the necessary conditions of salvation, and complied with them ; yet there is another question of great importance which we ought to propose to ourselves ; what lack I yet ? what is necessary to improve my virtues, to perfect my character, and fit me for the highest station in heaven ? what service can I perform for God or my fellow-creatures, which shall evince the strength of my affection for both, and tend to improve it ? After every attainment which you perceive you have made in religion, stop to ask this question ; what lack I yet ? and when you have discovered, by the light of conscience or Scripture, what you have further to do, do not turn away from your duty with sorrow, as this rich young man did ; but resolve to perform it, although it should be with the loss of your friends, of your substance, and even of life.

2. We see on what our preparation for eternal life depends : not upon the mere belief of certain articles of faith, obscure and difficult to be understood, and which have no influence upon the practice ; not upon the observance of many ceremonies, which have no tendency to mend the heart ; but upon keeping the commandments, upon observing all the moral precepts of the law. Happy was this young man, in being able to say, “ All these have I kept from my youth up ;” but his weakness appeared in not being willing to do something more, and to go on unto perfection. Happier still shall we be, if to the keeping of these commandments, we are able to add the performance of every other service which God may require from us.

3. From the conduct of this young man, and the declarations of Christ, we may learn what powerful obstacles the possession of riches throws in the way of our duty. He was prevented by them from following Christ, and from attaining the highest degree of perfection and happiness which was within his reach. The sacrifice required from him indeed was great : and such as is not necessary nor called for, in the ordinary state of things ; but the necessity of parting with a portion of wealth which falls much short of the whole, often tempts men to neglect their duty. Let those, therefore, who have large possessions be aware of their danger, and take the alarm : they are surrounded with snares and temptations, which require constant watchfulness and care. The love of money is the root of all evil : let them see that it does not tempt them to neglect any important service which they are able to render to mankind ; and especially, that it does not lead them to acts of fraud and injustice, of cruelty and oppression.

If the cause of religious truth is to be promoted in the world ; if a reformation of manners is desirable, we must not, in general, expect such services from the rich and great. They have not fortitude to incur odium or danger, nor generosity to make the necessary sacrifices. It is men in the middle or lower class of life who are the most ready for this important work ; the disciples, who were fishermen and mechanics, forsook all to follow Christ, while the rich

man could not be induced to sell his possessions. In this sense also, as well as that which has been mentioned, is the saying of Christ verified, that the first shall be last, and the last, first.

Lastly : We have here a striking example of the piety and humility of Christ. He was displeased with the language and address of one who ascribed to him excellency which belonged to God only. Let no one, therefore, imagine that he shall please Christ, by attributing to him divine honours, and exalting him to an equality with his heavenly Father : he wishes for no honours, but such as arise from the character of a divine prophet, and the greatest benefactor of the human race.

SECTION XLVI.

Parable of the labourers in the vineyard.

MATTHEW xx. 1—16.

1. FOR the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning, to hire labourers into his vineyard.

The conduct of God in the Christian dispensation, is like that of a master of a family, who goes out in the morning, to hire labourers to work in his vineyard. The general design of this parable is to show that at whatever time men come to the belief of Christianity, whether early or late, their rewards will be the same ; their merit consisting in obeying the call, whenever it was given, and the time of the call depending upon the will of him who made it. The occasion which led Christ to use this parable is mentioned in the last chapter, verse the twenty-seventh ; where Peter says, in the name of the other apostles, "Behold we have forsaken all, and followed thee : what shall we have, therefore ?" By this question he plainly insinuates that their conduct had been particularly meritorious ; both in embracing the gospel when it was rejected by others, and in doing it with the loss of all they had in the world ; and that, therefore, for such distinguished merit some extraordinary reward might be expected. In his answer to this question, Christ assures them that the losses which they sustained by professing the gospel would be abundantly recompensed, both in this world and in the next. He at the same time, however, warns them to beware of imagining, that because they were the first to believe the gospel, they were on that account to be rewarded, above others who received it at a later period : for in regard to this matter, those who were last to believe the gospel would be treated as the first, provided they embraced it as soon as it was offered to them. The virtue of each is alike, and, therefore, they shall receive a like reward. "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." It was to illustrate this point that Christ had recourse to the parable before us, in explaining which

we must not look for a moral in every part, but must remember that many things are introduced, in order to connect and complete the narrative.

2. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, *seven-pence a day, in our money*; he sent him into his vineyard.

3. And he went out about the third hour, *about nine o'clock*, and saw others standing idle, "*doing nothing*," in the market-place.

This was the place where labourers usually stood, to offer themselves to hire.

4. And said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you, *i. e. the customary wages*; and they went their way.

5. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise, *i. e. at noon, and three in the afternoon*.

These persons sent into the vineyard, were intended to represent those who, at different times, made a profession of the Christian faith, according as they had opportunities of receiving it.

6. And about the eleventh hour, *five o'clock in the evening*, he went out, and found others standing unemployed, and said unto them, Why stand ye here all the day, doing nothing?

7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us.

These represent heathen nations, who are late in receiving the gospel; not because they are averse to the Christian religion, but because it has never before been preached to them.

He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive.

8. So when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first; "*from the last to the first*."

9. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man seven-pence.

10. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man seven-pence.

11. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, "*the master of the family.*"

12. Saying, These last have wrought but one hour; and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day.

Those who first embraced Christianity, and were exposed thereby to persecution, might imagine that some grand distinction ought to be made between them, and others who received it at a later period, and who had not the same difficulties to struggle with. But Christ, the steward, under the direction of God the householder, will bestow the same general reward upon the last as upon the first; even the gift of eternal life. This shall be bestowed upon all who labour in the vineyard of the gospel, whether they enter at a later or an earlier period of time, whether they professed it in the time of Christ and his apostles, or not till many thousand years afterwards. But although the reward be one and the same to all, consisting in an eternal existence of future happiness, yet that existence must be of different value to individuals, according to the work they have done, and the proficiency they have made in Christian virtues. We cannot, indeed, suppose that at the day of final retribution, any good men will think they have reason to complain, or to be dissatisfied; Christ puts into their lips the language of complaint, not to answer future objections, but such objections as would be made at present. The first Christians, comparing themselves with their successors, would think themselves entitled to something more than they. The folly of such an expectation Christ exposes, by the answer which the householder makes to those workmen who had entered the vineyard at the dawn of day.

13. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for seven-pence?

14. Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give unto this last even as unto thee.

Seeing I have given thee the wages which I promised thee, thou hast no reason of complaint; and if I choose to give to those who came last into the vineyard the same wages as I have given unto thee, what right hast thou to find fault?

15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? "*in my own affairs.*"

Am I not free to act as I please, in the management of my own concerns? If I choose to perform an act of generosity, by bestowing upon these men the same as upon you, who has any right to complain?

Is thine eye evil because I am good?

An evil eye is a Hebrew phrase for an envious disposition, derived from the well-known circumstance of this disposition appearing in the eye, or in the countenance. The meaning then is, Because I am kind, art thou envious ?

16. So the last shall be first, and the first last.

As the householder gave the same wages to those who went last into his vineyard, as to those who came first ; so, those who are last to receive the gospel, because it was not brought to them sooner, shall receive the same reward as those who embraced it first.

For many be called, but few chosen.

These words seem to have no connexion with the design of this parable : for if the purpose of it is, what I have explained it to be, to show that, whether men enter later or earlier into the gospel dispensation, they will receive the same reward ; it is an observation totally foreign from this design, to say that many are called to be Christians, but few of them chosen. I am therefore inclined to think, with Bishop Pearce, that the words are an interpolation, inserted here from chap. xxii. 14, where they are found word for word, and are very suitable ; being applied to the case of those who were invited to the marriage-supper, and refused to come ; so that the king was obliged to fill up their places from the high-ways and hedges. This supposition seems to be confirmed by the words being omitted in several Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, and in one version of great authority.* We have no reason to be surprised or alarmed at discovering these mistakes ; their origin is easily accounted for, and they by no means destroy the genuineness of the other parts of Scripture.

The explanation which I have now given of this parable is different from the construction which is put upon it by several others. Thus some have supposed that it relates to the several ages of man ; to those who are converted in their infancy, youth, manhood, middle age, and old age : and that it was intended to declare that those who repent at the close of life, shall be accepted of God and possess eternal life, as well as those who are converted at an earlier period : but this, however true, appears to have no connexion with the subject of which Christ is here speaking, which is the merit of those who embrace the gospel at different periods of time. Others have supposed that it refers to the Gentiles being admitted to the same privileges as the Jews, under the Christian dispensation, and the envy and disgust which the Jews conceived on that account ; but this envy is represented as taking place not on account of their being admitted into the vineyard, which was the ground of contention between the Jews and Gentiles, but on account of their all receiving the same reward for their services in it, which is a matter of quite a different nature, about which we hear no dispute.

* Griesbach in loc.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, let us learn to guard against the odious spirit of envy. We there see men murmuring, to find that others enjoy the same advantages as themselves ; which is indeed but too just a picture of the disposition of human nature, and of what actually takes place in human life ; and, I fear I may add also, in the church of Christ : but let not Christians suffer their hearts to be infected with such a temper. If Providence should favour others with the same blessings which we possess ; with the same portion of worldly good or of worldly honour ; with the same Christian privileges ; and if it should give these blessings upon the same terms as it has given them to us, or even upon easier, let us not, on this account, murmur or complain. Let us not think that we are unjustly treated, because others are raised to a level with ourselves, and we cease to be distinguished from our brethren. Let us rather rejoice in the divine liberality, which extends its bounty to so many, and heartily congratulate those who are the objects of it. To take pleasure in thinking that we ourselves are the peculiar favourites of heaven, and that others are excluded from this honour, discovers a narrow, selfish spirit, wholly unworthy of Christians ; but to repine at the prosperity of others, to grieve because they are as happy as ourselves, shows the utmost malignity of disposition.

2. Let impenitent sinners learn from the explanation which has been given of this parable, that it affords no colour to the hope which they cherish of the efficacy of a death-bed repentance. Those who are sent to the vineyard at the ninth and the eleventh hour, are not persons who become religious towards the close of life, but bodies of men, in different parts of the world, who make profession of Christianity at a late period from the first publication of it, because it was not brought to them sooner. This affords no encouragement to those who, having the gospel of Christ in their hands, and professing to believe in it, propose to delay complying with its precepts to the last hour of life, because they hope that their repentance, even at that late period, will be accepted. This is a vain presumptuous hope, no where countenanced in the Scriptures. The repentance which the gospel requires, does not consist merely in a confession of sorrow for past sins, and in promises of future amendment, but must be accompanied with a change of vicious habits, and the reformation of life ; a business which cannot be accomplished in a moment, but requires much time. Let no man, therefore, any longer reconcile his mind to the idea of delaying repentance, with this wretched subterfuge : it is a false and groundless hope, which, if he rest upon it, will plunge him into ruin. Now is the accepted time : now is the day of salvation : harden not your hearts.

SECTION XLVII.

Jesus, on the way to Jerusalem, informs his disciples of his approaching death, and reproves their desire of pre-eminence.

MATTHEW xx. 17—34.

17. AND Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, *aside from the multitude*, and said unto them,

18. Behold, we go up to Jerusalem ; and the son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes ; and they shall condemn him to death ;

19. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles, to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him ; and the third day he shall rise again.

This is the third time that Christ plainly foretels his own death to his disciples : he now adds a circumstance which he had not mentioned before ; that he should be delivered to the Gentiles, to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified ; this refers to his being delivered to Pilate, the Roman governor, and his soldiers.

20. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children, "*of the sons of Zebedee*," with her sons, worshipping him ; "*falling down before him*," and desiring a certain thing of him.

Salomè, the mother of the two apostles James and John, was one of those pious women who attended Christ and ministered to him. This gave her boldness to ask a favour of Christ, thinking that he could not deny it to one who had shown so much attachment to him. She might be encouraged to make this request, likewise, from observing that Jesus had been accustomed to take her two sons apart from the other apostles, as if they were particular favourites. Her falling down before Christ was nothing more than a common token of respect, paid to kings, prophets, and other great men, among the Jews.

21. And he said unto her, What wilt thou ? "*what dost thou desire ?*" She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right-hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

The sons of Zebedee, James and John, conceiving the kingdom of heaven which Christ came to establish to be of a temporal na-

ture, thought it of great importance to obtain for themselves the promise of the most honourable situations in it; and therefore, send their mother to Jesus, to request that they might sit, the one on his right-hand, and the other on his left: the seats usually allotted to those who were next in dignity to the prince.

22. But Jesus answered, and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of; [and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?*]

You ask for the first places in my kingdom, by means of your mother, because you think that these places will afford you all kinds of gratification; but it is much otherwise. you totally mistake the nature of the honour which you are asking for; yet, since you wish to partake of my glory, I will ask you, Whether you are willing to share with me in my sufferings, for the sake of the gospel? This question Christ asked, strongly insinuating, that the only way to elevation in his kingdom was by the path of suffering.

The cup of any person signifies, both in sacred and profane authors, that portion of good or evil which is allotted to him; and to drink of his cup, is to partake of his portion. To be baptized, is also a figurative expression for being overwhelmed with great calamities, and is borrowed by our Saviour from the language of the Old Testament, where afflictions are represented by great waters, ready to overflow or overwhelm a person, i. e. to *baptize* him. Thus David says, Psalm xlii. 7, “Thy waves and thy billows are gone over me;” and in another place, Psalm lxix. 2. “I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.” The intimation which Christ gave the two apostles by these questions, that in order to partake of his glory they must share with him in his afflictions, might have intimidated and discouraged persons less ambitious; but they answer without hesitation.

They say unto him, We are able.

23. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, [and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with;] but to sit on my right-hand and on my left, is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them, *or*, “*except to them*,” for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Christ does not here mean to deny that he had a power of appointing to men their stations in heaven; for that would be inconsistent with what he is represented as saying in the book of Revelation, iii. 21, “To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” He means, that he could not give to any the chief places, except to those who were most eminent for their

* This last clause is wanting in the best MSS. and in some versions, and is omitted by Griesbach in his second edition.

virtues ; particularly, for their faith and fortitude : for it is such persons only who are entitled to the chief places, by the unalterable laws of God.

24. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Each of the disciples was ambitious of obtaining this honour for himself, and thought himself, probably, as well qualified for it as the sons of Zebedee. They were, therefore, extremely offended at their arrogance in asking it for themselves.

25. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know, that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them ; “ *lord it over them,*” and they that are great, exercise authority upon them ; “ *exercise a harsh authority over them.*”

The words in the original, in both clauses, convey the idea of an oppressive and tyrannical government. Christ, being displeased with that pride, which made some of his disciples ambitious of worldly honour, and others of them jealous of superiority, calls them all together, in order to correct those false notions which they entertained of the honours they were to enjoy in his kingdom. He tells them, that they were of a totally opposite nature to what they imagined ; consisting not in the power of exacting from others unlimited obedience, like earthly princes ; but in the possession of talents for doing the most extensive good to mankind.

26. But it shall not be so, “ *let it not be so,*” among you ; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, “ *your servant.*”

27. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, “ *slave.*”

Since pre-eminence in my kingdom is only to be obtained by superiority in virtue, and particularly, in acts of beneficence ; if any one wishes to be greatest, let him be more condescending and laborious than others in the services which he performs for his brethren. He will then obtain the highest honours ; but these are honours which no one need envy him ; for they consist only in pre-eminence, in labour, condescension, and self-denial ; virtues, of which I have given an example in my own conduct.

28. Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

For I have not undertaken my prophetic office with a view to any worldly benefit or honour, which I might derive from the attendance and services of mankind ; but solely for the purpose of serving them, by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and instructing the ignorant and vicious. To this purpose, I devote my time and attention, while I live, and for promoting the same grand

and useful design I shall also die, laying down my life as a ransom or deliverance, i. e. the means of deliverance, for many. For my death, by affording a clear proof of my divine mission, and preparing the way for my resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, will furnish men with the most powerful means of delivering themselves from subjection to sin, now, and from the fatal consequences of it in another world. This example of humility and usefulness do you learn to imitate, and then you will be esteemed worthy of sitting next to me in my kingdom.

Because the word we here render ransom is sometimes applied to a price in money, or to some other valuable, paid for the release of a captive slave or criminal, to him who had power over him, many have been led to consider the death of Christ as an equivalent price, paid by him unto the justice of God, for the release of sinful men from those penalties to which they were become obnoxious by transgressing his laws. It is well known, however, that words deviate much by use from their original signification, and that the New Testament, in particular, abounds in words and phrases, borrowed originally from the Mosaic institutions, and applied only in a metaphorical sense to things under the Christian dispensation. This seems to be the case here, where Christ appears to have no intention of conveying to us the idea of a price at all, by calling his life a ransom ; but only of its being an expedient to deliver mankind from a state of subjection and misery, particularly, sin and its consequences. As a ransom is the means of deliverance, so is also the death of Christ, although in a very different way.

29. And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

30. And, behold, two blind men, sitting by the way-side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.

These men had heard that Jesus had already performed a great many extraordinary cures, and therefore hoped that he would perform a miracle upon them. As the loss of sight was a heavy calamity to them, they were very importunate in their request.

31. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should, "*that they should,*" hold their peace ; but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David !

The reason why the multitude charged them to be silent, probably was, because Jesus was talking to his disciples, as he walked along, and the noise of these men would prevent him from being heard.

32. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and

said, What will ye, "*what do ye wish,*" that I should do unto you ?

Jesus knew what they wanted ; but he put this question to them, that the surrounding multitude might be satisfied that they were blind, hearing it from their own lips, and being able to observe it themselves. The answer they made, likewise manifested their faith to the surrounding multitude.

33. They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

34. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes ; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

By touching their eyes, Jesus showed that the miracle proceeded from himself.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the power of Christ to foretel his own death, with the minutest circumstances attending it, we have a clear proof of his divine mission ; and in the manner in which he behaved with this prospect before him, an example of the excellence of his character. Notwithstanding he knew Jerusalem to be the city where his most inveterate enemies resided, the place in which he had already been in danger, and which was to be the scene of his most cruel sufferings ; yet he goes up to this place of his own accord ; giving us hereby the most striking example of invincible courage, and of cheerful obedience to the will of God : of courage, in approaching danger, and in exposing himself to it with tranquillity and composure ; of obedience, in doing this in compliance with the will of God, and for fulfilling the grand designs of his Providence ; of disinterested benevolence, in cheerfully offering himself to the most ignominious and painful death, for the benefit of mankind. From this part of his conduct let us learn to admire the strength of his virtues, and resolve to imitate his example, if God or man require from us the same sacrifices.

2. In the conduct of the mother of the sons of Zebedee, we have an example of the folly and weakness of parents, in seeking great things for their children. They wish them to become rich and great, and distinguished in the world, and for this purpose they will labour hard themselves, and earnestly importune others to grant their assistance ; yea, they will go to the throne of God himself, and fervently implore the interposition of his providence, to favour their designs. Justly may we apply to them the words of Christ ; " ye know not what ye ask." Were they to obtain what you ask for them, it would prove their ruin. Riches would make them luxurious and profligate ; power, tyrannical and oppressive ; and honour, proud and ambitious. Such a temper of mind, the

usual effect of greatness, would be the heaviest misfortune that could befall them, and probably would end in their destruction. Let parents then learn to seek, in the first place, for their children not riches and honours, but virtue and piety, which make the noblest distinction among human creatures, and constitute true happiness : what degree of worldly good they shall possess, let them, without anxiety, leave it to Providence to determine.

3. Let us all remember, that the way to the highest honours in the kingdom of heaven, is not to exalt ourselves over our brethren, by thinking highly of our own merit, or to beg of God to bestow these honours upon us, while we neglect the qualifications which he requires ; but to excel in real virtue, to be more ready than others to serve our brethren by acts of beneficence and mercy : by accepting of the humblest stations and meanest offices : by drinking of the bitterest cup which Providence can put into our hands, in order to accomplish this important purpose. This is the road to true greatness in the kingdom of heaven, and we are never further from it, than when we are ambitious, and fond of power, averse to do good, if it require any abasement of ourselves, and unable to bear sufferings in the cause of truth, which is the foundation of human happiness. If these maxims of Christ were remembered, what a happy change would it produce in the church of Christ ! We should then see Christians contending with each other, not who should be first in worldly power, but who should sacrifice most for the welfare of the human race. What important benefits would not this have rendered to mankind : what animosities and contentions, what war and bloodshed would it not have prevented ! Few are the evils which Providence brings upon mankind, in comparison with those which men bring upon each other by the want of Christian charity, by a proud and selfish spirit. Every man seeks his own good, without regard to his neighbour's, or even in direct opposition to it. Christians strive not to be the servants, but lords of all. Let us cultivate a more disinterested and generous temper, more worthy of those who have received from God the invaluable blessings of the gospel, more becoming the disciples of him, who, being in the form of God by his miraculous gifts, took upon himself the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, for us men, and for our salvation.

SECTION XLVIII.

Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph, and drives the money-changers from the temple.

MATTHEW xxi. 1—17.

1. AND when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples ;

The mount of olives was so called from the fruit which grew there. These places were at the distance of about two miles from Jerusalem, on the eastern side of the city.

2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straight-way you shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her : loose them and bring them unto me.

It was the colt only that was wanted ; yet Jesus ordered the ass likewise to be brought, in order to increase the pomp of the ensuing procession. This animal was commonly used for riding in Judæa, not only by ordinary persons, but by those of the first rank, and even by princes. Accordingly, we find that Solomon rode upon a mule at the solemnity of his coronation, 1 Kings, i. 33. The country did not afford many horses.

3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord, "*the Master,*" hath need of them ; and straight-way he will send them.

Jesus was known to the person to whom the asses belonged, who would, therefore, be very ready to lend them to him, as soon as he knew that he had occasion for them.

4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5. Tell ye the daughters of Zion, Behold thy king cometh unto thee meek, and sitting upon an ass, and "*even,*" a colt, the foal of an ass.

The former part of this quotation is taken from the prophet Isaiah, lxii. 11, and the remainder from the prophet Zachariah, ix. 9, both which places were supposed by the Jews to be prophecies of the Messiah. The daughter of Zion signifies the city of Jerusalem, so called, because mount Zion was one of the hills upon which it was built.

6. And the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them ;

They went to the place he had mentioned to them, and found the ass and the colt in the situation he had described. This must convince them that Jesus acted on this occasion under divine direction, and confirm their faith in his divine mission.

7. And brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes ;

Some manuscripts* have it, *on him*, i. e. the colt : for Jesus only rode one of them : or perhaps they might put their clothes on both, and leave it to him to choose on which he would ride.

And they set him thereon.

That is, upon the clothes with which they had covered the colt, in place of the usual furniture. The dress of the Jews, consisting of a loose robe, was not ill adapted for this purpose ; so that the ridicule which a late writer has endeavoured to throw upon the evangelist, as if he had made our Saviour to ride upon two asses at the same time, is totally without foundation.

8. And a very great multitude, "*the greater part of the multitude*," spread their garments in the way, "*in the road* ;" others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the road.

That is, on each side of the road, leaving him a clear passage in the middle. In this manner it is usual in the east for the inhabitants to express their joy, when they go forth to meet great personages ; and a custom nearly resembling it, likewise prevails in the western parts of the globe, that of strewing the road with flowers. Jesus, in suffering these honours to be conferred upon him by the multitude, appears to depart, in some degree, from that simplicity of manners which he had hitherto maintained. Yet, in this temporary elevation, we may still observe his humility. He does not enter Jerusalem upon a triumphal chariot, or a horse richly caparisoned, as was the usual practice with princes in the neighbouring countries : but upon an ass, as the princes and judges used to ride, in the best days of the Jewish government ; (Judges, v. 10,) and with no other covering, than what the clothes of his disciples afforded.

9. And the multitudes that went before and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David !

The word Hosanna, is composed of two Hebrew words, which signify, Save I beseech thee, or Save now ; but which, being used as a common acclamation, were contracted into one word. It is taken from Psalm cxviii. 25. The multitude, by applying it to Jesus under the title of the son of David, express their good

* See Griesbach in loc. Second edition.

wishes for his prosperity and success, as the Messiah ; for it was generally understood by the Jews, that the Messiah was to be a descendant of David.

Blessed is he, "*blessed be he,*" that cometh in the name of the Lord.

This expression, like the preceding, is taken from Psalm cxviii. By applying it to Christ, they express their joy in the character which he sustained, as a divine messenger, sent to instruct the people : for, to come in the name of the Lord, is to come by his appointment, and with his authority.

Hosanna in the highest.

By the *highest*, we are to understand the highest places, or the heavens, where God is supposed to reside. The meaning will then be, "Thou who art in the highest heavens, save him, I beseech thee !"

Jesus, who before strictly charged his disciples to tell to no man that he was the Christ, permitted this language to be held by the multitude, because his ministry was almost ended. The time was near when he was to be publicly acknowledged by all in that character.

10. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this ?

The crowd which attended him, and the acclamations of the multitude, brought together a great part of the city, who naturally inquired who this extraordinary personage could be, who was so highly honoured, and who excited so much joy.

11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary miracles which Jesus had performed, the people were led to form no other idea of him than that of a prophet ; a character which was well known, and very familiar to the Jews, from the ancient history of their country.

12. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple ;

It surprises us to find persons of this description in a place which the Jews held in such veneration, even to superstition : but we are to remember that the place where this traffic was carried on, was not the house which was called the temple, in the proper sense of the word, but an open court which surrounded it ; yet it was still within the wall which inclosed the whole building, and therefore, might justly be deemed sacred ground. Here it was that proselytes to the Jewish religion, and any persons who were worshippers of the God of Israel, were permitted to enter, and to offer up their prayers ; whence it was called the court of the Gentiles. As wine, salt, oil, and a variety of other things, were necessary for sacrifices, they were brought into this court, surrounding

the temple, and sold there; and, as the evangelist John tells us, (ii. 15,) even sheep and oxen. It was out of this court that Christ turned those who were traffickers in these articles, the demand for which was increased by the approach of the feast of the passover.

And overthrew the tables of the money-changers;

Every Jew, that was twenty years of age, was obliged to pay a piece of money every year, towards defraying the charges of the temple. As this was a small coin, in circulation in Judæa only, it was the business of these money-changers to furnish Jews, who came to Jerusalem from foreign countries, with these small pieces of money, in exchange for larger, upon which traffic they received a profit. These were stationed, as well as the dealers mentioned before, in the court of the Gentiles.

And the seats of them that sold doves.

Those who were so poor, as not to be able to purchase sheep and oxen for sacrifice, were allowed to offer doves. To furnish the poor with these offerings, these birds were brought into the court of the temple; but Christ drove away all those who were engaged in this, or any other kind of traffic. Being followed by a great multitude, who appeared ready to support him, the traders were prevented from making any resistance.

13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer, "*shall be a house of prayer*;" but ye have made it a den of thieves, "*robbers*."

The passage to which this refers is found in Isaiah, lvi. 7. "for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people:" but prayer could not be offered in a place that was disturbed with the noise of cattle and the conversation of men who were transacting business. This was, therefore, a gross perversion of a part of the temple which was appropriated to devotion. Christ, in saying that the traders had converted the temple into a den of robbers, refers to the unjust arts which were practised by them in this commerce: they laid schemes for over-reaching and cheating each other, in the same manner as robbers in their caverns lay plots for taking from the traveller his money.

14. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

15. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, "*his miracles*," and the children, "*the servants*," i. e. *his disciples and followers*, crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David, they were sore displeased.

The word here translated *children* signifies, in almost every other place in the New Testament, with only one or two exceptions, servants; and it ought so to have been translated here: for it is

not likely that only children sang Hosanna to Christ in the temple, or that the Pharisees would have been so much displeased with children for doing it. Luke (xix. 39) says that some of the Pharisees desired him to rebuke his disciples for thus crying after him. The retinue of Christ, his followers and disciples, might not improperly be called his servants.

16. And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus said unto them, Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.

By babes and sucklings, Christ does not here mean those who were so in years, but those who were such in regard to knowledge. In Matthew, xi. 25, Christ thanks God that he had hidden things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes, i. e. to such as were ignorant. These are also the babes of whom he here speaks. Those who were literally babes and sucklings could not perfect praise : for they are not able to speak.

17. And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany ; and he lodged there.

He feared that if he continued at Jerusalem, the multitude might occasion some tumult during the night.

REFLECTIONS.

1. AFTER the example of this multitude, let us welcome the Saviour who comes in the name of the Lord : we have now attended him through a great part of his ministry, and seen enough of his character to form a just estimate of its worth. We have seen him healing the sick of their diseases, restoring reason to the disordered, limbs to those who had lost them, the faculties of seeing, hearing, and speaking, to those who had not the complete use of their senses and members ; and raising the dead to life. We have seen him laboriously employed, in instructing an ignorant and vicious nation in the purest principles of piety, moral justice, and benevolence, and enforcing his precepts by the clearest assurances of a glorious immortality beyond the grave, or by dreadful denunciations of future misery ; and doing all this in the midst of the greatest opposition and danger. We have seen the humility, the piety, the purity, the fortitude, the benevolence, in the practice of which he lived, and we now behold him going up to Jerusalem to give the last and highest proof of his obedience to God, and the strongest instance of his love to the human race, by laying down his life for them ; how high ought such a character to stand in our esteem ; how well is it entitled to our gratitude and love ! Let us celebrate his virtues in strains of the highest admiration and praise : let us bless God, who has raised up for us such a benefactor, and congratulate each other, that we are born in an age when we can be witnesses of his actions, and enjoy

the advantages of his instructions, example, and sufferings. Blessed be he who cometh in the name of the Lord ! May God confer upon him the highest honours which he has to bestow ; may he pour out upon his head all the blessings which are lodged in the treasures of infinite mercy ; may mankind revere his memory, and celebrate his praises to the latest generations !

2. Sad is the character which our Lord here gave of a place of merchandise ; that it was a den of robbers, a scene of fraud and treachery, where men were dividing the booty which they had unjustly acquired, and laying plots to procure more. What greatly aggravates their crime is, that this was practised in the precincts of the temple, under the eye of that omniscient Being who was supposed to hold his peculiar residence there. What effrontery in wickedness ! How hardened must their consciences have been ! Surely, there was something peculiar in the situation of these men, which could make them all combine in the same unlawful practices : some temptation of peculiar force to which they were exposed, and to which men in the ordinary concerns of trade are not liable. Let all men, however, who are employed in commerce keep the strictest watch over themselves, lest they should be influenced by like principles, and hereby bring upon themselves the same disgrace. Let them guard against a mercenary and avaricious spirit : let them be contented with moderate profits, and employ no unjust arts, to increase the distresses, or to take advantage of the ignorant of mankind. The false weight, the unjust balance, the faithless assurance, the deceitful promise, the artful concealments of defects, are all an abomination to the Lord. Whether men buy or sell, let them remember that golden rule of equity, which ought to be inscribed, upon every heart, to do to others as they would that others, in the like circumstances, do unto them.

SECTION XLIX.

The fig-tree blighted. Christ discourses with the priests and elders respecting his authority.

MATTHEW xxi. 18—32.

18. Now in the morning, as he returned into the city, he hungered.

Christ, after having spent the day at Jerusalem, retired at night to Bethany, a small village a little distance from it, and lodged there, at the house of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. In the morning he returns to the city to pursue the work he had begun there.

19. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee hencefor-

ward for ever ; and presently, "*immediately,*" the fig-tree withered away.

By the Jewish law, which you have Deut. xxiii. 24, 25, a man, in passing through his neighbour's vineyard or corn-field, was allowed to eat as much of the grapes or the corn as he pleased ; but to carry nothing away. By this law, which the Jews extended to all ripe fruits, Jesus was authorized to gather the figs off this tree, if there had been any. This blasting the tree was not the effect of passion and resentment, in consequence of being disappointed, but intended to teach the disciples, and the Jews in general, a useful moral lesson : for it was usual for the prophets in the Old Testament to teach by action, as well as by words. Thus we find some of them ordering themselves to be smitten on the head ; others, taking up horns of iron, or setting fetters of iron on their legs. By blasting the fig-tree, therefore, Christ probably intended to show the punishment which the nation of the Jews, who had been unfruitful under their late cultivation, had to expect. That this was the intention of Christ in working this miracle, seems likely from the nature of it, and likewise from the account which is given by the evangelist in the same chapter of two parables, which he spake about the same time to the Jews, and which he concludes with this remarkable application : " Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This may serve as a key to our Saviour's meaning in his blasting the fig-tree, as well as in the two parables. The Jews were to be taught by this miracle, performed on the barren fig-tree, that they would be consigned over to destruction, to wither away as a nation, and to dry up from the roots. Considered in this view, the miracle conveyed a seasonable and useful warning to the Jews.

20. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away !

21. Jesus answered and said unto them ; Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree ; but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done.

To enable a person to work a miracle was a high favour, which God did not think proper to confer upon any, except those who had a firm faith in his ability to perform it. For want of this faith the disciples were not able to cure a dæmoniac who was brought to them ; but wherever there was a firm reliance on the divine omnipotence, there was no miraculous effect so extraordinary, Christ tells his disciples, that they would not be able to perform it. When he says that faith would enable them to remove mountains, he uses a hyperbolical expression ; meaning, thereby, that they would be able to do things which might appear as extraordinary as removing mountains ; and not that they would be able to do it literally.

22. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, “*with faith*,” ye shall receive.

Whatever miracles you may desire to have performed, to establish your divine mission, or to excite the attention of mankind to your doctrine, shall be wrought, if your prayers be accompanied with a sufficient degree of faith in God. The subject of which Christ is here speaking is the power to work miracles; and, therefore, no inference can be drawn from his language, concerning the inclination of the Divine Being to grant to men whatever they may ask of him by prayer, in ordinary cases, as some have imagined. As praying to God is here mentioned in connexion with working miracles, it is probable that whenever a miracle was wrought, it was preceded by a short prayer, addressed by the person performing it to the Divine Being, requesting him to exert his power for the purpose desired. These are not noticed by the evangelist, because they were offered in silence; but in the case of Lazarus we find Christ addressing his heavenly Father publicly, saying, “I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always;” referring probably to his secret requests for power to work miracles in other instances.

23. And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people, *the members of the Sanhedrim*, came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?

The evangelist Mark tells us, xi. 18, that before they put these questions to Jesus they had taken council how they might kill him, because the people followed him, and they were alarmed for their own credit. These questions were, therefore, proposed with a view to find something in his language whereof to accuse him.—Hence we see the reason of our Lord’s method of replying to them.

24. And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I, in like wise, will tell you by what authority I do these things.

Knowing their insidious design, and that they did not really want information upon the subject about which they inquired, he answers their question by asking another.

25. The baptism of John whence was it? from heaven or of men?

By the baptism of John we are not to understand any particular method of baptizing proselytes, peculiar to John; but his preaching and doctrine. Christ inquires whether they thought this came from heaven, i. e. from God, who resides in heaven; the palace, by a common figure, being put for the prince; or from men? We

see then, to come from heaven, is the same thing as to come from God. This language will, therefore, serve to explain what is said of Christ's coming down from heaven; which signifies no more than that he received a commission from God; and not any real descent from heaven.

And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, "from heaven," he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

Had they acknowledged that John received his commission from heaven, they must have confessed their own guilt in rejecting his testimony: for John declared himself to be the forerunner of the Messiah, or of some distinguished prophet far superior to himself. To admit the truth and divine authority of the Baptist's testimony, was, therefore, to admit that Jesus was the Messiah: for there was no other person who had any pretensions to be the prophet to whom John referred.

26. But if we shall say, "of men," we fear the people: for all hold John as a prophet.

Had they publicly declared that John had no divine commission, they would be in danger of being stoned to death by the people, who all believed him to be a teacher sent from God. Under this dilemma they knew not what to say: in whatever way they answered, they found themselves obliged to make concessions which they were not willing to make.

27. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

The miracles which Jesus wrought were abundantly sufficient to satisfy every unprejudiced mind that he was supported by the authority of God; and no declaration of his own could have satisfied those who were not convinced by this evidence. The scribes and elders, therefore, who demanded his own declaration, could have done it only with a view to cavil, and were not entitled to any answer.

28. But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.

29. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went.

30. And he came to the second, and said like wise; and he answered, and said, I go, Sir; and went not.

31. Whether of them twain, "*which of the two*," did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first.

The design of the parable is to show that those who appear most likely to perform their duty are not the most ready to do it. The son who refused to work in the vineyard, afterwards goes thither; while he who promised to go neglects to fulfil his engagement.

Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

None seemed more unlikely, at first view, to become Christians, than the class of people here mentioned: yet they had fewer prejudices to overcome, and were more likely to receive the gospel, than the scribes and Pharisees, who made great pretensions to religion.

32. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, "*unto you who profess righteousness,*" and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye might believe him.

It is not the righteousness of John, but the righteousness of the Pharisees, of which Christ speaks in this verse.

REFLECTIONS.

1. THE conduct of Christ towards the fig-tree affords an instructive lesson to those who carry a fair show of religion, but do not possess it in reality.—There are many who assume the appearance of devotion; who make large professions of their attachment to the gospel of Christ, and who are very constant in their attendance upon the ordinances of religion; but possess not the temper, and practise not the duties, which Christianity requires. Although their conduct in general may appear unexceptionable, there is some passion to which they abandon themselves; the love of pleasure, the love of gain, or of honour; and to which they sacrifice every other interest. Such characters may impose upon men, weak and ignorant like themselves, and procure the reputation of great excellence; but they cannot deceive an omniscient Being. He requires something more than appearance of religion, and partial obedience: he expects that a solid foundation be laid for our duty in the affections of the heart, and that his laws be uniformly and constantly observed. Where this is not done, professions of religion afford him no pleasure; he will destroy without mercy those who make them; they shall be blasted and withered like the barren fig-tree. Let those who assume the appearance of religion, without the reality, remember that the pains they take to acquire or preserve a fair character, will afford them no lasting benefit. The time is coming when their barrenness will be detected, and they themselves shall be withered.

2. The success of John, in gaining proselytes from among the lowest and vilest of the people, may afford us ground for encouragement in communicating religious instruction. If those upon whom we expected to make a favourable impression should deceive us, by continuing hardened and impenitent, we may be more successful in other instances, where we expected little good. It is the usual conduct of Providence, to disappoint what we think our best established expectations, in order to teach us to rely principally upon God, and not upon our own exertions. "In the morning, therefore, sow thy seed, in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not which will prosper, whether this or that; or whether they shall be both alike good."

SECTION L.

Parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen.

MATTHEW xxi. 33—46.

33. HEAR another parable. There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it, "*fenced it*," round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country, "*went from home* ;"

In the preceding verse, Jesus had reminded the Scribes and Pharisees of their guilt in rejecting John the Baptist: he now proceeds to represent the crime of the whole nation, in rejecting and ill-using all the other messengers of God, who were sent to instruct and reform them, from the earliest period to the present times; and, particularly, in destroying the greatest and most honourable of them all, his beloved Son. For these offences he now tells them, they would be deprived of the peculiar privileges which they enjoyed under the Mosaic dispensation, and visited with the severest judgments. As these were offensive truths, Christ does not deliver them in plain language, but under a parable, which, however, they would understand without much difficulty, as it had already been used by one of their prophets. See Isaiah, v. 1, where the prophet compares the children of Israel to a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. The householder is here said not only to have set a fence about the vineyard to defend it from the ravages of wild beasts, but likewise to have digged a wine-press in it. This is agreeable to the custom of the east, where wine-presses are not moveable, as with Europeans, but formed by digging hollow places in the ground, and surrounding them with mason-work.* The tower here mentioned was a small turret, in which a watch was stationed, to guard the vineyard from thieves, when the fruit was ripe; which was therefore so situated, as to overlook the whole

* Harmer's Observations, vol. I. p. 332.

vineyard. This was occasionally used by the proprietor for pleasure.*

The vineyard with its appurtenances, represents the Mosaic dispensation of religion, which was attended with many privileges and advantages. The husbandmen to whom it was let out were the Jews.

34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

God sent his prophets to exhort the Jews to lead a holy life; the fruit which might naturally be expected from those who enjoyed the advantages of a divine revelation.

35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

Mark and Luke and some versions of Matthew† read, *beat one, threw stones at another, and killed another*. The meaning of this is, that the Jews, irritated by the severity with which they were reprov'd by the prophets, treated them with all kinds of ill-usage, and even put some of them to death.

36. Again he sent other servants, more, *i. e. greater, or more honourable*, than the first; and they did unto them likewise.

God, although highly displeased at the reception which his messengers met with from the Jews, did not proceed to execute his vengeance upon them immediately; but manifested the greatest mercy and forbearance, raising up other prophets, more eminent for the excellence of their character or their miraculous endowments than the first; yet these were not better treated than their predecessors.

37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son.

The householder had good reason to expect that the husbandmen, although they despised and ill-treated his servants, had not so far lost all respect for himself, as to abuse his son, his dear child. In the same manner there was reason to suppose that, although ordinary messengers who had been sent to the Jews were persecuted and slain; yet one who was honoured with the superior title of *Son of God*, and who appeared, by the extraordinary things that were revealed to him, and the numerous miracles which he wrought, to be the peculiar object of divine affection, would have been attended to and respected. There is no intimation given here that the last messenger differed in nature from the first, or that he was of a superior order of beings. He was a man like unto them, and only superior to the other members of the household, as the son is superior to the servant; more dear to the master, and standing in a more honourable relation to him.

* Harmer's Observations, vol. II. p. 241.

† Griesbach in loc.

38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

By this, Christ means to intimate that the Jews would consult together to put him to death: but what is observed about his being the heir, and that by destroying him, they might seize his inheritance is added to complete the parable. It was natural language for husbandmen, in the circumstances here stated, but has nothing to correspond to it in the history of Christ or the Jews.

39. And they caught him, "*took him,*" and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

As the husbandmen treated the son of the householder, so would the Jews treat Christ; conspiring against his life, and actually putting him to death.

40. When the lord, therefore, of the vineyard "*the owner,*" cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season.

According to the evangelists Mark (xii. 9,) and Luke (xx. 16,) Jesus himself answered the question which he had proposed; and Luke adds, "when they," i. e. the priests, "heard it, they said, God forbid." This corresponds perfectly well with the question which Christ puts to them in the forty-third verse, which seems to imply that they had denied the propriety of the conclusion which he had made. It is highly probable, therefore, from these circumstances, that the words, *they say unto him*, have been introduced into this place by some mistake; a conjecture which is confirmed by the authority of one manuscript copy of the original, which omits them.

42. Therefore, I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation, "*to a people,*" bringing forth the fruits thereof.

The kingdom of God here signifies the rights and privileges of the people of God. The Jews had been hitherto distinguished by benefits and privileges, above all the other nations of the earth: they were, on this account, esteemed to be a people peculiarly dear to God. Christ now declares, that, in consequence of their persecuting and destroying him and other divine messengers, these privileges would be taken away from them, and given to the Gentiles, who should thenceforward be esteemed the people of God, and who would be more worthy of the name.

43. And Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures ; The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner ; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

What the Psalmist had said in his own person, Psalm cxviii. 22, Christ applies to himself, as expressing the purposes of divine Providence respecting him. The stone which is the head of a corner in a building, occupies the most conspicuous place, and is the most useful : for by its weight it binds close together all the stones which are below it. To such a stone Christ compares himself : he was rejected by the Jewish builders, the priests and elders, as unworthy of a place in that spiritual temple which God was erecting ; but to this exalted and important place would God raise him. Such a surprising change would be a subject of admiration to good men in all ages, who could not but perceive the hand of divine Providence in it.

44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Christ, having spoken of himself as a stone, goes on to employ the metaphor, in order to express the unhappy condition of those who rejected him, and the still more wretched state of those whom he should punish for this crime. As in common life, he who falls upon a stone, may break a limb ; but he, upon whom a stone falls, may have all his bones broken, and be crushed to pieces ; so, those who took offence at the doctrine of Christ would be hurt thereby, because the kingdom of God would be taken from them ; but when he came to destroy the Jewish state, then he would accomplish their complete ruin.

The priests and Pharisees, perceiving the drift of these parables, and that Jesus had them in view, were highly incensed against him, and would have apprehended him immediately : but they were afraid of doing it amidst a crowd of people, by whom he was regarded as a prophet.

45. And when the chief-priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

46. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe how exactly the prophecies of Christ contained in these two parables have been accomplished. He foretold that the kingdom of God should be taken from the Jews, and given to another nation ; and we find that a people who are not descended from the stock of Abraham, and who were once regarded with contempt by the Jews, now worship the true God, the God of Israel, have just views of his perfections, and obey his laws. We likewise see that the Gentiles, under this new state of things, enjoy the highest degree of prosperity, being the most enlightened, the most distinguished, and the happiest of the nations of the earth. The promise of Christ, therefore, has been, in regard to them, most completely fulfilled ; nor is his faithfulness less conspicuous in the accomplishment of his threatenings. For the Jews, who were once so high in the divine favour, have experienced every mark of his displeasure : after enduring unparalleled calamities in the land of Canaan, they have been driven from it, their temple destroyed, their power overturned, they themselves dispersed through every quarter of the globe, and every where oppressed and persecuted. Thus have these husbandmen, who refused to give to the householder the fruit of his own vineyard, and who stoned and killed those who were sent to demand it, been miserably destroyed by him. Thus has the stone, which the builders rejected, crushed them to powder.

That the calamities of the Jews have befallen them, principally, on account of their rejecting Christ, is evident : for they took place soon after he appeared among them, and they continue to the present day, because the Jews persist in their unbelief. When they were severely punished for other crimes, by being carried captive into foreign lands, they were restored to their own country and the divine favour, upon their repentance ; but no remission of their punishment has taken place here, because there have not appeared the like symptoms of remorse for this offence. Let us learn to adore the hand of Providence in these events, which discover so manifestly the severity of the Divine Being against offenders. Let us rejoice especially, that one who appeared in such mean circumstances, and was once so much despised, is now raised to the most exalted situation.

2. Let Christians take warning from the sufferings of the Jews. Although they may not be guilty of the same crime as the Jews, in rejecting the Messiah ; yet, if they bring not forth the fruits of their religion in their season ; if they corrupt the purity of its doctrines or ordinances by the inventions of men, if they violate its moral precepts without fear, and thus disappoint the just expectations of the master of the vineyard ; they will bring upon themselves calamities, similar to those which the Jews have endured.

The history of the Christian church in past ages, and many striking events which are taking place every day, bear full testimony to this truth. Let us, therefore, learn wisdom from the suffer-

ings of others, and take care to avoid the like evils. The apostle Paul has given us his opinion upon this subject, Rom. xi. 17, 23, "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, wert grafted in amongst them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree; boast not against the branches; but if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed, lest he also spare not thee."

SECTION LI.

Parable of the marriage-feast.

MATTHEW xxii. 1—14.

1. AND Jesus answered, and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

The chief priests and elders being afraid to apprehend Jesus, he continues his discourse, and goes on to represent to the people the rejection of his gospel by the Jews, and the punishment they would bring upon themselves thereby, and, at the same time, the welcome reception it would meet with among the Gentiles, and the privilege which they would thence acquire of being ranked among the people of God.

2. The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king which made a marriage, "*a marriage-feast*," for his son.

Under the image of an invitation to a feast Christ represents the offer of the gospel to the Jews. This contained the choicest blessings which God had to bestow, and might be fitly compared to the dainties of a feast upon the most joyful occasion, the marriage of a son.

3. And sent forth his servants, to call them that were bidden, "*invited*," to the feast; and they would not come.

The persons invited were the Jews, the covenant-people of God, who had been informed by the prophets of the approach of the Messiah's kingdom, and afterwards by John and Christ himself, and exhorted to prepare themselves for it by repentance of their sins. To these invitations the majority of the Jewish nation paid no regard.

4. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are invited, Behold I have prepared my dinner ; my oxen and fatlings, "*fattened beasts*," are killed, and all things are ready ; come unto the feast.

The other servants, sent to carry the second invitation, were the prophets and other preachers of the gospel, after the resurrection of Christ and his ascension on high. At the time of their mission, the prophecies had been accomplished, his miracles wrought, and he himself had risen from the dead ; the evidence, therefore, of the divine origin of his religion was complete ; the kingdom of heaven, which had been before announced, was begun ; the feast was ready ; nothing was wanting but the guests.

5. But they made light of it ; and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize.

6. And the remnant, "*the rest*," took his servants, and intreated them spitefully, "*ill-treated them*," and slew them.

These messengers were as unsuccessful as their predecessors ; the men to whom they came, undervaluing the honour which was offered them, went to their business ; some of them, more rude than the rest, insulted, beat, and slew the messengers who were sent to invite them to a feast. This was intended to represent the reception which the apostles and other first messengers of the gospel would meet with from the Jews, to whom it was to be first offered : they would not listen to their invitations, and attended only to their farms, their merchandize, and other gainful employments. To neglect they would add insult, cruelty, and barbarity, by shamefully abusing and putting to death the preachers of the gospel.

For the king to send to invite his subjects and his supposed friends to the marriage-feast of his son, was a strong expression of his regard, and the highest honour that he could confer upon them. To make such trifling excuses for not complying with it, and much more to wound and to kill those who brought it, was a high affront and great outrage ; we are not to be surprised, therefore, to find that it was considered in this light by the king, and treated accordingly.

7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city.

This part of the parable plainly alludes to the destruction of the Jews, and the sacking of Jerusalem by the Roman armies ; and to the cause of these calamities : it was for killing the prophets, and stoning them that were sent unto her.

8. Then saith he to his servants, The feast is ready ; but they which were invited are not worthy.

That is, they are highly unworthy ; as the Jews had discovered themselves to be by their conduct. Paul and Barnabas probably alluded to this part of the parable, in the language which they held to the Jews on the occasion of their turning from them to the Gentiles. Acts xiii. 46. " Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary the word should first have been spoken to you ; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo we turn to the Gentiles."

9. Go ye, therefore, into the highways, "*the cross-roads*," and as many as ye shall find, invite to the feast.

The king had first sent to invite a select class of his friends, for whom he had more than an ordinary regard ; but they had rejected his invitation, and ill-treated his messengers ; he now sends servants into the public roads, to invite all that they should meet, without distinction. This refers to preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. They had not hitherto been favoured with prophets and revelations of the divine will, but seemed to be a people cast off and neglected by him, with whom he had no more connexion, than a person has with those whom he accidentally meets with in the high-roads. As the Jews showed themselves unworthy of the longer continuance of his peculiar favours, they were now offered to the Gentiles ; without any distinction of nation or rank, to the Greek and barbarian, to the bond and free.

10. So those servants went out into the cross-roads, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good : and the feast was furnished with guests.

The servants executed the orders which they had received, by bringing to the feast all that they met ; not by force or compulsion, but by argument and persuasion ; by telling them of the dainties of the feast, and assuring them that they would have a hearty welcome. In the same manner would the first preachers of Christianity bring into the Christian church, from among the Gentiles, men of all characters, the bad as well as the good.

11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.

12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment ? And he was speechless.

As the persons assembled on this occasion were collected together from the highways, and must, therefore, have consisted of poor as well as rich, it may appear extraordinary that the king should ask one of the guests, with surprise and displeasure, how he came there without a wedding garment, and punish him with so much severity for not having one, when his poverty might so rea-

sonably have been admitted as an excuse for his dress. But this difficulty is removed, when we know the custom of the eastern nations, whose wealth consisted very much in possessing large collections of dresses. Hence it is, that when our Lord speaks of laying up treasures on earth, he says, "that the moth may corrupt;" plainly alluding to clothes. From these dresses, or from others collected on the occasion, it was usual to furnish the guests at marriage-feasts; and as one was offered to every individual, this man was highly blameable for appearing in common clothes. He hereby offered an affront to the master of the feast, and to the other guests; nor had he any excuse to make for himself; he might have been dressed in a wedding garment, if he had chosen to accept of it.

This wedding garment was intended to represent to us the virtues of the Christian life, which we are all furnished with the means of attaining by the gospel of Christ, and which, if we do not possess, it is our own fault.

13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Entertainments were usually made at night by the ancients, and the rooms were well lighted with torches or lamps. This will serve to explain to us what is meant by outer darkness: it means the darkness without the room; into this darkness the guest was ordered to be thrown, who had ventured to join the company without a wedding garment. Thus driven from a royal banquet, and bound hand and foot, he would feel the highest degree of mortification and disappointment, which he would express with the strongest marks of sorrow and anguish, by weeping and gnashing the teeth. The punishment of this man was intended to represent to us the unhappy condition of those who, having embraced Christianity, and joined themselves to the society of Christians, have not acquired the virtues which the gospel of Christ requires. The difference between them and others will be observed by the discerning eye of God: they will be separated with disgrace from the society of the virtuous, and condemned to pain and misery.

14. For many are called, but few are chosen.

All who are called are not approved of. The proportion between those called and those rejected, does not seem to be here referred to: for according to the literal interpretation of the parable, there was but one rejected out of a large number.

REFLECTIONS.

1. How thankful should we be that we are invited to this feast, the privileges and honours of the Christian dispensation ! It contains the choicest blessings of heaven ; food which is suited to every palate, calculated to refresh and cheer the mind ; as much superior to the provisions we had before, as a royal banquet is to an ordinary meal. There was a time when we were not thus honoured ; when the favour of the Divine Being seemed to be confined to one nation, and we of the Gentile race appeared to be neglected and despised by him : and although we had no reason to complain of our condition at that time, yet ought we to admire and praise his liberality, which now admits the whole human race to sit at his table, and which has made such a happy change in their circumstances. The fall of the Jews is become the riches of the Gentiles. O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !

Let us not repeat the folly of the Jews, who, when invited to accept of the blessings of the gospel, refused to attend to the invitation, and turned to their farms and their merchandize. We have seen how severely they have been punished for their offence ; we have seen that which was only foretold in this parable, fully accomplished ; we have seen those murderers destroyed, and their city burnt up ; and we shall be chargeable with double folly, if, with the effect of theirs before our eyes, we choose to imitate it.

2. We see how necessary it is to possess the virtues of Christians, if we expect to enjoy the full benefits of their religion. Although we embrace Christianity, rank ourselves among the followers of Jesus, and partake of all the privileges of the Christian church ; yet, if we subdue not our passions ; if we practise not the virtues of piety and benevolence, there is something wanting, which is necessary to procure us admission into heaven. There is an eye which penetrates through all outward forms, and observes the dispositions of our minds, and the real conduct of our lives. Let us now, therefore, seriously reflect upon this subject, and endeavour to prevent that dreadful horror and dismay, that speechless confusion, which will seize us at the last day, if, when we present ourselves to our judge, we are found destitute of any of those qualifications which he requires : disregarding external forms, as of little consequence, let us apply ourselves to cultivate substantial virtues in our hearts and lives. This is the only attire which is beautiful in his eye, and which can procure us a seat at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

While we know that we are clothed in this apparel, we may look forward with joy to the period, when, according to the language of the parable, the king shall come to review his guests ; it will be a period of exultation and triumph ; a period when we shall enjoy in perfection those refined pleasures, of which the present privileges and blessings of the gospel are but a slight foretaste.

SECTION LII.

Christ discourses with the Pharisees and the Herodians.

MATTHEW xxii. 15—22.

15. THEN went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk, “*in his discourse.*”

In the twenty-third verse of the preceding chapter we find an attempt made to put Jesus to silence by the members of the Sanhedrim, by asking him, by what authority he acted; perceiving that they could do nothing against him by the influence of public authority, the same malicious enemies have recourse to secret artifices, in order to accomplish his ruin. They send persons to ask him captious questions, by answering which he might lose his credit with the people, or expose himself to the jealousy of the Roman governor. To these measures the Pharisees might likewise be provoked by the parable of the marriage-supper, in which he plainly foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and the call of the Gentiles.

16. And they sent unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

We know that thou speakest the truth freely, teaching, with sincerity, that way of life which will please God; and that thou regardest not the external condition of men, whether they be high or low, rich or poor, so as to accommodate thy instruction to their vitiated taste, and to obtain their favour or to avoid their displeasure.

The Herodians are supposed to have been those Jews who concurred with Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee; who, in order to gain the favour of Augustus, the emperor of Rome, persuaded the Jewish nation to pay the tribute which he had imposed upon them. They were principally of the sect of the Sadducees; for the evangelist Mark (viii. 15) represents Jesus as saying to his disciples, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod;” instead of which Matthew has, (xvi. 6,) “the leaven of the Sadducees:” so that the different appellations only expressed the same persons.

The Pharisees maintained an opposite doctrine, that it was not lawful to pay tribute to any foreign power; which they grounded upon Deut. xvii. 15, which says, “Thou mayst not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother;” and in this sentiment they were followed by most of the people.

Violently as these two sects hated each other, they forgot their antipathies, to unite in a scheme for destroying the life, or ruining the credit of Jesus. With professions of the greatest respect to him, and of a tender regard to the dictates of conscience, they propose to him a question, which, in whatever way he answered it, would, as they apprehended, expose him to danger. If he declared that it was not lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar, the Herodians would take occasion to represent him to Pilate as a seditious person, who opposed the authority of the Roman government : if, on the other hand, he decided in favour of the lawfulness of paying tribute, he would give great offence to the common people, who were zealous in maintaining the contrary doctrine, and thought it would be the great business of the Messiah, when he came, to deliver them from the taxes and oppressions of the Romans. Such a decision would, in their apprehension, be inconsistent with the claims which he might appear to have to that character. Confident of the success of the scheme which they had thus laid for ensnaring him, they propose to him the following questions.

17. Tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou ? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not ?

18. But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites ?

He calls them hypocrites, because, while they made conscience and a regard to the divine will a pretext for this question, the real motive was a desire to ensnare him.

19. Show me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny.

This was a Roman coin, called a *denarius*, in circulation among the Jews, of the value of seven-pence halfpenny of our money. In this coin the tribute had been usually paid ; but upon what it was levied, whether upon persons or property, or in what proportion, does not appear.

20. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription ?

The Roman money, as well as our own, bore the image of the prince, and contained an inscription with his name, titles, and claims.

21. They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.

As you suffer Cæsar's coin to be circulated among you, you thereby virtually acknowledge his authority over you, and that you are bound to pay him tribute, like other Roman provinces. Render to him, therefore, that which, by your own acknowledgment, is his due : paying tribute to Cæsar is not inconsistent with your duty to God : he claims, however, from you obedience to his laws,

which you must carefully render to him, even when they happen to interfere with the claims of Cæsar.

The Pharisees, and with them the great body of the Jews, through a mistaken idea of religious obligation, were inclined to refuse obedience to the Roman governor : on the other hand, the Herodians, in order to court the favour of the great, were for sacrificing every thing to him, both their religion and their consciences. The answer of our Lord regards both. To the former he says, that their obligation to obey God did not prevent them from obeying the civil magistrate, in those things to which his authority extended ; to the latter, that the rights of God were to be strictly preserved to him, even in those instances where they might happen to interfere with the claims of civil governors.

22. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

They were surprised that he should perceive their design, and that he should have so much wisdom, as to avoid the snare which they had laid for him ; they went away, therefore, chagrined and ashamed.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IN the conduct of the Pharisees and Herodians towards Jesus we have an example of what mean arts malicious men will stoop to use, in order to ruin or injure the object of their malice. They came to him with professions of the greatest respect, with high encomiums upon the excellence of his instructions, and upon the fearless integrity with which they were delivered ; thus professing things totally opposite to the real sentiments of their hearts, in order that, being induced by these praises to express his opinion without reserve upon a political question, they might have an opportunity of accusing him of what would be deemed a political crime. Base and hypocritical men ! who could thus assume the form of virtue and friendship, in order more effectually to deceive and ruin.

But such methods of ensnaring the innocent are not confined to the Pharisees of old. Would to God there were no other country than Judæa, in which the same arts are employed for the same wicked purpose : where men endeavour, by flattery or insult, to allure or provoke their brethren to use language, which may afford ground of accusation and punishment ! Such men have no reason to boast of their practices ; they are following the example of the Pharisees and hypocrites, of the enemies of Jesus, and of all goodness.

2. From the character here given of Jesus, and from his conduct upon the present occasion, we may learn in what manner a public teacher of the gospel ought to act. His enemies say of him that he delivered the truth freely, without regarding the person of men ; without regarding the manner in which it might be receiv-

ed ; neither courting the favour of the great, nor seeking to avoid their displeasure. In this description they give him a just character, and such as is worthy the imitation of all those who are called to instruct mankind in their duty. They must not deny or conceal what they apprehend to be important principles, from the fear of personal danger. It is their duty to declare the truth with freedom and boldness, without considering whether it may please or offend those who hear it, whether it may promote or obstruct their temporal interest. Yet with this boldness caution may be mixed ; nor is there any reason for unnecessarily exposing ourselves to danger ; for our Lord, although he does not deny the truth on the present occasion, but delivers a decision which would please neither party, and might offend both ; yet expresses himself in such cautious language, as would not afford his adversaries an opportunity of injuring him : thus uniting the prudence of the serpent with the innocence of the dove.

3. Let us attend to the exhortation which our Lord here gives to the Jews ; to render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are God's.

The authority of the civil magistrate is founded upon public utility : he is invested with such a degree of power, as the majority of the community approves, for preserving the peace and promoting the happiness of society ; to refuse obedience to him, therefore, in the exercise of this authority, or to deny him that support which is necessary for fulfilling the purposes of his office, by artful evasion or open violence, is to oppose the general welfare, to withstand the purposes of heaven, which are always directed to the general good, and to commit no small crime. We ought, therefore, to obey him, not only for wrath, but for conscience-sake. If, however, he exceed the bounds to which he is limited by the office with which he is invested ; if he apply to his own use, or to any foreign purpose, that power which is given him for the public welfare, there the obligation to obedience and support ceases : for there a regard to the general good does not require obedience. The business of the civil magistrate is confined to civil concerns ; the regulation of religious practice and belief belongs to a higher power : if, therefore, he take upon him to determine, even by sanction of the authority of the community, what men shall believe in religion ; when or how they shall worship God ; and in doing this enjoin things which conscience does not approve, or God has nowhere required ; here submission to him would be treason against heaven ; it would be to deny to God the things which are God's, and to give to men the things which do not belong to them. If any blame us for this opposition, let us answer, in the words of the apostle, "whether we ought to obey men, rather than God, judge ye."

SECTION LIII.

Christ discourses with the Sadducees on the resurrection.

MATTHEW xxii. 23—33.

23. THE same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,

24. Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

This law is found in Deut. xxv. 5. The design of it was to prevent the inheritance from going out of the family, by the widow of the deceased marrying a stranger. It was also a custom which prevailed among the patriarchs before the giving of the law. Hence the Sadducees took occasion to object to the doctrine of the resurrection, which was taught by our Lord, and thought he would find it as difficult to answer their objection, as the Pharisees had. What they mention is not, probably, what really happened, but a case supposed.

25. Now there were with us seven brethren ; and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and having no issue, left his wife unto his brother.

26. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

27. And last of all the woman died also.

28. Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven ? for they all had her.

The Pharisees, believing the doctrine of a resurrection, rather from tradition than any express authority of Scripture, had formed very gross conceptions concerning the future state of good men, and supposed it to be more like a Mahometan paradise, in which we are to enjoy all kinds of sensual pleasure, than that state of refined delight which the gospel teaches us to expect. To them, therefore, this objection of the Sadducees appeared unanswerable : for if the ties of marriage were binding in heaven, as well as upon earth, the same woman would have seven husbands.

29. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

They discovered ignorance of the Scriptures, in denying a resurrection from the dead ; because, as he proves immediately, the

Scriptures contain evidence of that doctrine. They betrayed ignorance of the power of God ; because they imagined it impossible for him to restore to life a body once resolved into the dust of the ground ; or at least to give it any frame or constitution materially different from that which it now possesses.

30. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage ; but are as the angels of God in heaven.

The marriage relation will no longer be suitable to the state of men, after the resurrection : for they will cease to be flesh and blood, as they now are ; which, we are told, cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven ; nor will any of the human race die any more, so as to make an addition to them by procreation necessary ; but they will be immortal, like the angels of God.

31. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying,

32. I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ? God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

To prove a resurrection of the dead, Jesus refers them to the language of God to Moses at the bush, *Exod. iii. 6*, where he calls himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob : for he would not have called himself the God of these patriarchs, if they had perished, and were never to be restored to life again : his denominating himself their God was, therefore, a security to them that they should rise from the grave. In this argument our Lord evidently goes upon the supposition that there is no intermediate state between death and the resurrection, in which the soul exists separately from the body : for if there were such a state, God might be said to have verified the truth of his declaration, by preserving the souls of good men in it alive and happy, without any resurrection of the body ; and therefore his argument would have no force with a Sadducee to prove a resurrection.

33. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.

They were surprised to find him discover an argument for the certainty of a resurrection of the dead, in a passage of Scripture in which they never observed it before. There are intimations of this doctrine in other books of the Old Testament, besides what we have here ; but this is referred to by our Lord, as being in one of the books of Moses, which alone the Sadducees are said to have admitted as authentic ; or, at least, to which they paid a much greater respect, than to those of the other sacred writers.

REFLECTIONS.

LET us be thankful to God for giving us, in the gospel of Christ, such clear evidence of a resurrection from the dead ; for not leaving us to collect this important doctrine from the uncertain testimony of tradition, or from hints scattered throughout the Old Testament, which, after all, must be acknowledged to be few and obscure, or from the conclusions of our own understandings, which never can amount to clear and absolute demonstration. We have clear and repeated declarations of this most momentous truth from the mouth of Jesus, who was fully acquainted with the divine counsels, and was commissioned by God to reveal his will to the world. He plainly tells us that whoso believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live again ; and that all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and come forth. The meaning of these promises is illustrated, and their truth confirmed, by the resurrection and ascension of Jesus himself. Hence we may discern the value of the gospel, which assures us of the reality of these events, and exhibits the evidences on which our belief of them is founded. It is the only charter of our hopes of immortality, the best gift of God to man ; without it the present life would be a scene of utter darkness and sorrow, but thus enlightened, it becomes a world of light and joy. Let us, therefore, join with the apostle Peter in his memorable act of thanksgiving upon this subject. “ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, of his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens.”

SECTION LIV.

Christ answers the questions of the Pharisees, and reduces them to silence.

MATTHEW xxii. 34—46.

34. BUT when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together, “ *they assembled for the same purpose ;*” *i. e. that of making trial of him.*

There was a constant spirit of rivalry between these two sects ; so that the Pharisees, hearing that the Sadducees were disgraced, resolved to try whether they could not acquire more credit than their adversaries, by proposing to him difficult questions.

35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, "*a teacher of the law*," asked him a question, tempting him, "*trying him*," and saying,

The person who is here called a lawyer, is in Mark xii. 28, said to be a scribe ; so that scribes and lawyers signified the same persons : those who made it their profession to study and expound the law of Moses and the traditions of the elders. They were all, or most of them, of the sect of the Pharisees.

36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law ?

This was a question much debated among them. Some maintained that the greatest commandment of the law was that which related to the sacrifices ; others, the law of circumcision ; and others, that which enjoined the observance of the sabbath. Yet they might have learnt from their prophets, that the performance of any outward ceremonies was of little value in the divine estimation, in comparison with the laws of justice, mercy, and piety.

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

The meaning of these words is, not that we are not to think of or love any thing, besides God : for that would be inconsistent with the condition of men in the world ; but that we are to bestow upon him our chief affection, and to love him better than any other object.*

This precept is found in Deut. vi. 5 : it is there preceded by a solemn declaration of the divine unity : "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." Were there two Gods, of equal perfection, it would be impossible to comply with this precept : for each would have an equal claim to our affection.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

This precept is superior in importance to every other : for whoever complies with it, will perform the most excellent of all duties, and cherish in his breast a principle, which will lead him to the performance of every other. God has a stronger claim to our affection, than any other being ; and if we love him with supreme regard, it will lead us to obey his will, not in one instance only, but in all.

39. And the second is like unto it.

The second is a great command likewise ; like unto the first in importance, although inferior to it. This is the only resemblance, which our Lord has in view, a resemblance, in point of importance, and not a resemblance between the virtues which the two commandments enjoin,—piety and charity.

* Several different phrases are here used, not to convey different ideas, but to express more strongly the same thing.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Thou shalt love him sincerely and unfeignedly, as every one loves himself; not equally, in point of strength of affection. The question of the lawyer, or rather of the Pharisees to him, respecting the first commandment, had no reference to the second; yet Jesus takes this occasion to mention it; probably, because the Pharisees were deficient in the love of their neighbour, as appeared by their repeated attempts to kill our Lord.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets.

All the institutions of the law and injunctions of the prophets, are established upon these two commands, of loving God and our neighbour; so that he who obeys them will be disposed to obey every other precept: it is hence, therefore, that they derive their importance.

41. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.

The Pharisees having proposed several difficult questions to Jesus, in order to display their own knowledge, and to ensnare or expose him, he now proposes a difficulty to them, which, if they were not able to remove it, would bring disgrace upon them in the eyes of the people, and check their forwardness for the future.

Son of David means a descendant of David, as they inferred from Is. xi. 1. where it is said; "and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." That this prophecy refers to the Messiah is evident from the subsequent part of it.

43. He saith unto them, How then doth David, in spirit, "*by the Spirit*," call him Lord, saying,

44. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right-hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

This quotation is taken from Ps. cx. 1, which is called a psalm of David; whence it appears that it was composed by him, or at least was supposed to be so; nor would our Lord have quoted it as his, unless it had been acknowledged by the Jews to have been written by him. In this psalm David, by the assistance of the Spirit of God, appears to be favoured with a prospect of the future Messiah; in the same manner as Abraham saw Christ's day; and to hear the language which God, the great Lord of all, addresses to him; desiring him to sit at his right hand, in the place of chief honour, until he should bring all enemies to his feet, or make them his footstool, i. e. reduce them to a state of the lowest subjection.

As David on this, as well as other occasions, spoke by the direction of the Spirit of God, (See 2 Sam. xxiii. 2,) his language

was a prophecy of the future kingdom and glory of the Messiah. But what our Saviour principally intended was to point out to the Jews the very honourable appellation which he gives him ; *my Lord*.

45. If David then call him Lord, how is he his son ?

The Pharisees expected that the Christ would be a temporal prince, who would possess great power and splendour ; but they had no conception that his superiority to David could be so great, as to entitle him to the appellation of his Lord : they were not, therefore, able to answer this question. What perplexed them occasions, however, no difficulty to us. When we consider the extraordinary communications of power and knowledge which were made to the son of David, while in the world ; the authority to which he is exalted, since his death, being made head over all things to the church, and appointed governor of a kingdom, which is to know no limits but the boundaries of the world, and entrusted with authority to raise the dead, and, among the rest, his ancestor David himself, and to dispose of their future condition ; we immediately see that he is unspeakably superior in dignity to any of the kings of Israel, not excepting the most illustrious of them, David and Solomon ; so that David, foreseeing his glory, might well be induced to call him his Lord.

It is plain from this passage that the Jews expected that the Messiah would be a man : for had they conceived him to be God, equal with the Father, or some super-angelic being, they would have found no difficulty in answering our Saviour's question. To ask why one who was a man should call him who was God, his Lord, would have been a question so plain, as hardly to deserve an answer.

46. And no man was able to answer him a word ; neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

The questions which had been proposed to him by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, with a view to ensnare him or expose him, had served only to display his wisdom, and confound his adversaries : they were, therefore, afraid of engaging in any fresh attempts of this kind, lest they should bring upon themselves greater disgrace.

REFLECTIONS.

1. LET us carefully cultivate these two affections, upon which so much depends ; which are the foundation upon which our obedience to all the laws of God must be erected ; the love of God, and of our neighbour.

For the former, let us meditate frequently upon the transcendent excellences of the Divine Being ; his eternal and independent existence and universal presence ; his great power, his supreme

wisdom and boundless benevolence, his justice, faithfulness, and truth. The union of these excellences cannot fail to inspire us with a high reverence for him ; and when we join to meditation upon his perfections the remembrance of the important benefits we have received, and are daily receiving from him, together with those which he intends to bestow upon us hereafter, such thoughts must warm our minds with gratitude and affection ; convincing us not only that he is the most excellent of all beings, but that he is our greatest benefactor and best friend.

It is not, however, a slight and transient conviction of the divine excellences, or of our obligations, that will produce that affection which is here required : it must be strong and powerful : deeply rooted in the mind, and overruling every other passion of the soul, whether it be the love of sensual pleasure, the love of gain, or of worldly honour. God disdains to accept of any other than the first place in our hearts ; nor is it possible that we should uniformly obey all his laws, if we permit him to have any superior or rival there. Let this induce us to cultivate this affection continually, and with the utmost care : if we succeed in our endeavours, and acquire that degree of love to God which is here recommended, as we shall certainly do if we persevere, it will abundantly reward us for all the anxiety and labour which it may cost, by the joy which it will communicate to the mind, and the happy fruits it will produce in our lives.

To induce us to love our brethren, we must recollect that they are all God's children, as well as we ; and that, therefore, they ought to be the objects of our affection, as well as of his ; that they possess many natural excellences, and, even when most degraded and corrupted, bear much of his image ; that they are capable of inconceivable improvement in knowledge and goodness, and that no inconsiderable number of them have already obtained a high degree of both ; that to cherish affection for our brethren, will be the source of unspeakable pleasure to ourselves, and of peace and harmony to the world ; but that to foster the contrary passions, malice and hatred against our brethren, will involve ourselves, as well as them, in great trouble. In judging of the degree in which this affection ought to prevail in our breasts, let us ever keep in mind the standard which our Saviour has given us — that we are to love our neighbour, as ourselves. If it be not sincere and ardent, like the affection we feel for ourselves, it will not enable us to discharge our duty to mankind, amongst such powerful temptations to the contrary.

Let these two affections, the love of God and the love of our brethren, be the objects of our ardent desire and daily pursuit : they are the two leading commandments, on which all the rest depend. The whole law is fulfilled in love.

2. Let us earnestly pray for the time when all the enemies of Christ shall be made his footstool.

He is already exalted to great power and honour at the right-hand of God ; but his triumph is not yet complete, nor his authority so extensive, as we are taught to believe that it will one day be. He has still many adversaries, who exist in great power : there are Jews, Deists, Mahometans and idolaters, who reject his laws, and

openly deny his authority : there are Christian powers, which have assumed to themselves that which belongs to him, and which claim that obedience to their ordinances which is due only to his laws : there are many errors which destroy the beauty, and defeat the efficacy of the gospel.

Let us pray that these obstructions to the glory of the Redeemer may be removed ; that the gospel may be restored to its original purity ; that infidels of every name may be induced to embrace it ; that those who have usurped his authority may be compelled to resign it ; that Christ may destroy the man of sin, with the spirit of his mouth and the brightness of his appearing ; and that thus the whole world may be completely subject to his laws.

In praying for these honours for Christ, we are praying for ourselves, for the peace and prosperity of the world, for the improvement and happiness of the human race.

SECTION LV.

Jesus discourses concerning the vices of the Scribes and Pharisees.

MATTHEW xxiii. 1—12.

1. THEN spake Jesus to the multitude and to his disciples,

2. Saying, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

That is, they are expounders of the law of Moses. This was not true of every individual of the sect of the Pharisees ; they were not all of them expounders of the law : our Lord, therefore, must mean such Scribes as were Pharisees, or Pharisaic Scribes.

3. All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.

We have here a proof, that general declarations which occur in the gospel are to be taken with certain limitations and exceptions, naturally suggested by the subject, or by the nature and propriety of things. For Christ cannot here mean to recommend obedience to all that the Scribes taught ; having before said, chap. xv. 3, that they made void the commandment of God by their traditions. Nor can he intend that all their expositions of the law were to be received with implicit credit ; since they were liable to fall into mistakes : but as many things in the law of Moses were obscure, and could not be understood without the knowledge of ancient languages and ancient history, he advises the people and his disciples, who were destitute of these advantages, to rely in general upon their explanations.

But do not ye after their works : for they say and do not.

The Scribes, although they expounded the precepts of the law in the most rigid manner, were very loose in regard to their own morals, as appears by their conduct towards Jesus, as well as from the account which he gives of them.

4. For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne ; and lay them on men's shoulders ; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

The allusion here is to beasts of burden, which when men have loaded with a heavy weight, they apply their hand to it, to keep it steady, and prevent it from falling. Such is the humanity of men towards beasts ; but no such compassion will the Scribes show to the people, whom they load with a strict interpretation of all the moral and ritual precepts of the law, without allowing those exceptions and limitations which reason and humanity require. This they did from an affected concern for the honour of the divine law ; but their real motive was what Jesus mentions in the following verse.

5. But, "*and*," all their works they do for to be seen of men.

If there be any appearance of virtue in their conduct, the excellence of it is destroyed by the motive whence it proceeds ; which is not a desire to please God, but to obtain the applause of men. Instances of their desire of praise and distinction he now goes on to mention.

They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments ;

The phylacteries were slips of parchment, worn upon the forehead and upon the arms, containing sentences of the law of Moses. This practice the Jews were led into by interpreting literally what is said, Deut. vi. 8, "and thou shalt bind them," meaning the precepts of the law, "upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes." It was usual for the Jews in general to wear them ; but the Scribes made them larger than common, in order that they might be more conspicuous, or contain a greater number of sentences from the law. What are here called the borders of their garments were the fringes or tufts of twisted thread, which the children of Israel were ordered to make on the corners of their garments ; probably, with no other view, than that of distinguishing them from other nations, and reminding them of their peculiar relation to God. See Num. xv. 37—40, where God said unto Moses : "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments, throughout their generations ; and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a riband of blue : and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of

the Lord, and do them." These fringes the Scribes made very long ; and hence it is that they are described, as loving to go in long clothing, and in long robes.* Their design in this was to render their observance of the law the more conspicuous.

6. And love the uppermost rooms "*the first places,*" at feasts, and the chief seats, "*the first seats,*" in the synagogues.

Whatever conferred honour and distinction, the Scribes were eager to secure to themselves, and were, therefore, fond of the first seats at all public places.

7. And greetings, "*salutations,*" in the markets, "*in the streets.*"

They love to be addressed by some respectful appellation ; such as that which follows ; Our father, master, teacher, which should point out the estimation in which they were holden.

And to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi.

This word, which signifies my master, or my teacher, was at first used by scholars to their instructors, but came afterwards to be applied to all those who distinguished themselves by their knowledge, and particularly, to those who were at the head of new sects in divinity. This title the Scribes were fond of receiving, as a testimony of their learning and consequence. For the opinions of those who were thus called, were held in great respect, and regarded almost as infallible. There seems no propriety in the repetition of the word Rabbi in this verse ; and we find it omitted in some ancient manuscripts, and in all the ancient translations ; which makes it probable that it is added by mistake.†

8. But be not ye called Rabbi : for one is your master, "*your teacher,*" even Christ.

Do not affect to be called teacher : for that title properly belongs to me, who am the source of all the supernatural knowledge you possess, and communicate to others.

And all ye are brethren.

These words are omitted here, and placed at the end of the next verse, in twenty different manuscripts of this gospel ; and it is evident that they have a much greater connexion with the language there used, than what is here said : for men are brethren, not because they are the disciples of one master, but because they are the children of one Father.

9. And call no man your father upon the earth ;

This was another title which the Jewish Scribes were fond of assuming, to intimate that their disciples were as much indebted to them for the formation of their minds, as children are to their parents for their existence ; and that, therefore, they were entitled to

* Mark xii. 38. Luke xx. 46.

† Griesbach in loc.

peculiar deference and respect : but Christ prohibits his disciples from assuming this title, for a reason which he immediately assigns.

For one is your Father which is in heaven ; and all ye are brethren.

For you are ultimately indebted to God for all the knowledge and wisdom which you possess ; to him, therefore, you ought to ascribe the honour, and not to men, who are only his instruments in conveying it. He is justly styled the Father of lights ; but this title cannot be given to any man, without encroaching upon his prerogative. There is a sense, however, in which the term father may be innocently used ; as when Paul says to the Corinthians ; “ Ye have not many fathers : for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”

10. Neither be ye called masters, “ *guides*.”

This was a third title which the Scribes assumed, in consequence of their being employed in expounding the Scriptures.

For one is your guide, even Christ.

Jesus has here been endeavouring to correct the folly of the people, in ascribing to their teachers and instructors titles and characters which belonged only to God and himself ; and to check the vanity of his disciples, who, after the example of the Scribes, might be disposed to claim them, by showing that they owe all their religious knowledge to God and himself, and that, with regard to each other, they are all upon a footing of equality, like brethren of one family : he next proceeds to show what kind of greatness was within their reach.

11. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

He that wishes to be greatest among you, must attain it not by assuming pompous titles, as the Scribes do ; but by stooping to perform the meanest offices of kindness and charity for his brethren.

12. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased ; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

He that assumes names and titles that do not belong to him shall be degraded in the opinion of God and of wise men ; and he that performs the lowest offices for the good of mankind shall rise high in the divine favour.

REFLECTIONS.

1. How despicable and odious is the character of these Scribes, as here exhibited ! They knew their duty, yet neglected to perform it ; they recommended one thing by their instructions, and practised

the contrary in their conduct ; thus furnishing matter to condemn themselves from their own lips. If there was any appearance of goodness in their actions, those actions proceeded from a mean desire of applause ; they were performed that they might be seen of men : yet these men, despicable and odious as their character were, claimed as much respect, as if they had been possessed of the highest worth. They looked for the first places at public entertainments, and the most flattering appellations and titles from all their acquaintance ; thus showing effrontery in wickedness. We are thankful that Christ has represented them in their true colours, and exposed them to the hatred they so justly merit : we are ready to hope that he has hereby effectually guarded his disciples against discovering any thing of a like temper. But,

2. It is a melancholy yet just reflection, that this warning has been given to little purpose, since these Jewish Scribes have been but too closely imitated by the Scribes of the Christian church ; so that the one have been almost an exact copy of the other. The teachers of religion, from the times of Christ to the present, have, in general, been fond of pre-eminence and power ; they have, like their predecessors, loved to appear in long robes, and to assume a garb which should impress upon men an extraordinary opinion of their dignity or sanctity. With the same view, they have clothed themselves with the most honourable titles, calling themselves Reverend and Right Reverend Doctors and Fathers, and every other name which is esteemed venerable among men. Such artificial means of securing respect were not unsuitable to the characters of Jewish Scribes or Popish priests, who had nothing else to recommend them ; but they are utterly unworthy of the simplicity to which Protestants lay claim. These distinctions of names and dress, which the teachers of religion have affected, may appear to some persons too trifling to deserve the notice of the Saviour ; yet, as originating in vanity, and having a pernicious influence upon the tempers of mankind, they merited his censure. The natural tendency of them is to fill one class of men with pride and arrogance, and another class with superstitious reverence ; to lead them to attend to show and external appearance, and to neglect the qualities of the mind and the virtues of the heart.

3. As the means of avoiding these errors, let us attend to our Lord's cautions : let us not claim to ourselves, or give to others, names and titles which can only be applied with propriety to the Supreme Being. Let us call no man father upon earth, in regard to religious opinions : let us submit to no human authority in these matters ; for men are all fallible and liable to err ; but regulate our faith and conduct by the language of God alone, who cannot be in the wrong. While we are grateful to men for the benefits we derive from their instructions, let us not forget that our ultimate acknowledgments are due to the Supreme Being, who is the Father of lights, and giver of every good and perfect gift. " Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers, by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?" However some may be distinguished by virtue or knowledge above the rest of mankind, let us remember that all men are brethren ; members of the same family, upon a footing of equality with regard to each other, without any authority

to dictate or to rule over the rest. Let Christian instructors ever keep in mind, that the way to rise into esteem with God and with wise men, is not by clothing themselves in a venerable or splendid garb, or by assuming high-sounding titles, but by studying the interests of mankind, and stooping to the lowest services for their benefit. It was thus the Captain of their salvation acquired immortal glory ; and if his followers attain the like honours, it must be by the like means ; those who seek to rise in any other way, only ensure their own disgrace.

SECTION LVI.

Continuation of the discourse concerning the vices of the Scribes and Pharisees.

MATTHEW xxiii. 13—26.

13. BUT WO unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites : for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer them that are entering, to go in.

Christ now turns from the multitude and his disciples, to whom he had before been speaking, to address himself to his inveterate enemies, the Pharisaic scribes, who now surrounded him, only watching for an opportunity to destroy him. He calls them hypocrites, because they said, and did not ; because they pretended to much piety and virtue, while they were enemies to both : he accuses them of shutting up the kingdom of heaven, because they gave such interpretations of the prophecies relating to the Messiah, and instilled into the minds of men such prejudices against Jesus, as prevented them from becoming his disciples, and subjects of that kingdom which he was about to establish.

14. WO unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites : for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer ; therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation, "*greater punishment.*"

You make great pretensions to devotion ; but it is only to gain the esteem and confidence of the weak and superstitious, that they may be induced to reward your piety, by giving to you freely of their substance. Your long prayers are a cloak to your avarice, which you are willing to gratify at the expense even of widows ; from whom, if you had any humanity, you would accept of no gratuity. Your pretences to piety, therefore, which serve to enhance your character among men, shall only expose you to severer vengeance from God, when he visits the Jews for their sins.

15. WO unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypo-

crites : for ye compass sea and land, to make one proselyte ; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

It would be better translated, “a child of hell, more deceitful than yourselves ;” referring to the double hypocritical character of the Pharisees.*

A proselyte was one, who, being born among the Gentiles, by submitting to the rite of circumcision, bound himself to obey the laws of Moses. To obtain such a proselyte, the Scribes were willing to undertake journeys by land, or voyages by sea, or to submit to any other labour that might be necessary : but their object was not to make men virtuous and pious, by communicating to them the knowledge of true religion ; but to increase their own consequence, by adding to the number of their adherents : for so eager were they to instil into him their own principles, that they made him more deceitful and hypocritical than themselves. “Child of hell,” is a Hebrew phrase, and signifies one deserving of hell ; in the same manner, as “son of death,” is one who is condemned to die ; and “a son of stripes,” one who deserves to be beaten.†

16. Wo unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing ; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor, “*he is bound.*”

The gold of the temple signifies the treasure of the temple, or the money that was brought thither, as an offering to God. This money the Scribes wished to have considered as peculiarly sacred, because they derived benefit from it ; and therefore declared an oath by the gold of the temple to be more binding than any other : under pretext, indeed, of a zeal for God, in whose house it was placed ; but, in reality, to gratify their own avarice.

17. Ye fools and blind ; “*blind and foolish men ;*” for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold ?

What rendered the treasure of the temple sacred, was its being appropriated to the temple-service : it was, therefore, a gross absurdity to say that it was more sacred, than that from which it derived its sacredness.

18. And whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing ; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty ; “*he is bound.*”

You have laid down another absurd doctrine in regard to oaths ; and from the same corrupt motive. You say that if a man swear by the altar, his oath is not binding ; but that if he swear by the

* See Schleusner's Lexicon, on the word $\Delta\epsilon\pi\lambda\omicron\varsigma$.

† 1 Sam. xx. 31. 2 Sam. xii. 5. Deut. xxv. 2.

gift which is presented upon the altar, he is bound to perform his oath ; hereby making the gift more sacred than the altar, because ye derive profit from it.

19. Ye blind and foolish men ! Which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift ?

20. Whoso, therefore, shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon ;

21. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein ;

22. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

The children of Israel were required to swear by the name of God or Jehovah, Deut. vi. 13, x. 20, and every Jew considered himself as bound to the performance of such an oath ; but where they swore by the heavens, by the temple, or by the altar, they considered themselves as at liberty to fulfil their engagements, or not, as they might think proper. Christ, in these verses, shows that there was no foundation for such a distinction : for as no one, in swearing by these things, could be so stupid as to appeal to inanimate objects as witnesses of his thoughts, and the avengers of perjury, but must have a secret reference to the Supreme Being ; he declares that these oaths were as sacred, as those in which the name of God was mentioned.

23. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites : for ye pay tythe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, "*justice*," mercy and faith, "*faithfulness* :—" these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

The tythe was a provision made by the law of Moses for the support of the Levites, the strangers, the fatherless, and the widow, Deut. xxvi. 12 ; and was, therefore, intended to proceed from the produce of the field, and not from garden herbs. The Pharisees, however, were so scrupulously exact in observing the injunctions of the law, that they tythed all small herbs. Luke vi. 42. Jesus does not condemn them for this ; but for neglecting the essential duties of religion, justice, charity, and fidelity, while they were thus exact in matters of no consequence.

24. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, "*strain out a gnat*," and swallow a camel.

This was a proverbial expression, founded upon the custom which prevailed in eastern countries, of passing their wine and other liquor through a strainer, in order to clear it from flies, which, in those hot countries might fall into it. Our Lord applies it to the Scribes, be-

cause they appeared to be anxious to avoid the smallest faults, yet indulged themselves in gross violations of the most important laws of morality, in private.

25. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, "*dish*;" but within they are full of extortion, "*of rapine*," and excess.

As the Pharisees were fond of washing, Jesus borrows a comparison from that subject, to expose the folly of their conduct. By being so extremely careful about their outward conduct, while they were secretly guilty of rapine, and every species of intemperance, they acted as absurdly, as the man who should wash the outside of the cup, but leave the inside full of filth. On this occasion, our Lord mingles the parable and the application of it together : for it was the Pharisee only and not the cup, that could be full of extortion and excess.

26. Thou blind Pharisee ! Cleanse first that which is within the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Christ still mingles together the parable and the application of it, in this verse as well as in the preceding. Cleansing the inside of the cup would not make clean the outside ; but if men correct the evil dispositions of the heart, the conduct will be reformed of course. This is what Jesus exhorts them to do.

REFLECTIONS.

1. To employ religion as a cloak for wicked designs : to assume the appearance of fervent piety towards God, and warm zeal for the best interests of mankind, only with a view to gratify more effectually our own ambitious, selfish, and interested purposes, is the worst kind of hypocrisy. Of this kind of hypocrisy were the Scribes guilty ; they made long prayers in public, not only to be seen of men, and to obtain a reputation for extraordinary piety and sanctity ; but to gain the confidence, and allure the beneficence, of the weak and superstitious. Such a conduct discovers a mind totally vitiated and corrupt, insensible to the fear and love of God, inured to fraud and treachery on the most solemn occasions. It is peculiarly hateful to God, because, under the show of respect for him, it is a real mockery and insult to his perfections ; it is highly injurious to men, because it leads the unthinking part of mankind to conclude that all pretensions to religion are equally false, and that those who assume the appearance of devout Christians are only concealed hypocrites ; thus prejudicing their minds against every attempt to cultivate true piety. But this abuse of religion has not been peculiar to the Jewish scribes : there have been men

in all ages, who have endeavoured to cover the most atrocious designs by a pretended zeal for the honour of God and the welfare of their brethren ; who have engaged in designs for plundering and murdering their fellow-creatures, with the language of piety and benevolence upon their lips. Let us hold such characters in abhorrence, in whomsoever they appear, and keep at the remotest distance from their practices.

2. Let us learn, from what Christ has said upon the subject of swearing, to reverence an oath ; not swearing upon light occasions, upon every emotion of anger or surprise, nor imagining that because we swear by heaven, by our faith, or by our souls, or by any other object, we shall escape the guilt of perjury. In all these expressions, and others of a like kind, there is a secret reference to the power and knowledge of God, who alone can know men's hearts, and punish their insincerity.

When we have once laid ourselves under the obligation of an oath, let nothing induce us to violate it ; neither the hope of gain, nor the fear of suffering. If artful and interested men should suggest to us refined distinction, to reconcile our conscience to the violation of them, let us reject them with abhorrence ; they are dangerous snares, which, if we fall into them, will destroy our peace, and ruin our souls. Let it be our ambition, to attain the character of that upright man, who, although he swear to his own hurt, still performeth his oath.

3. Let us pay our principal attention to the inward dispositions of the mind : they are the sources and springs whence outward actions proceed : if these be right, our conduct cannot long be improper ; but if they be corrupt, we shall fall into all kinds of disorders : for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemy : we ought also to remember that it is to the heart that God principally looks, and upon that chiefly grounds his approbation or censure. In vain is it, therefore, that by acts of devotion or charity we acquire a fair character among men, or obtain the best rewards of hypocrisy. A fair outward appearance will not recommend us to heaven, while the heart is fond of rapine and intemperance ; but rather, expose us to greater punishment.

4. Let us learn to estimate duties according to their real worth, Outward ceremonies are duties only of secondary importance, which derive their value from the efficacy which they have in leading us to observe the weightier matters of the law, justice, charity, and fidelity ; in our attention to the former, therefore, let us be careful that we do not neglect or overlook the latter. This would be to prefer the shadow to the substance : the means to the end. We see, from a variety of examples, besides those of the Scribes of old, and it ought to fill us with alarm for ourselves, that those who are strictly punctual in the one, may be scandalously negligent in regard to the other.

SECTION XLVII.

Continuation of Christ's discourse concerning the vices of the Scribes and Pharisees.

MATTHEW xxiii. 27—39.

27. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites : for ye are like unto whited, "*whitened*," sepulchres, which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness.

The Jews whitened their sepulchres, in order to point them out to passengers, lest, by coming too near, they should be defiled, which would be the necessary consequence of approaching a dead body. To such places, which were fair without, but full of uncleanness within, does Christ compare the Pharisees.

28. Even so, ye also, outwardly, appear righteous unto men ; but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

29. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish, "*adorn*," the sepulchres of the righteous ;

30. And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.

31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, "*so that ye bear witness of yourselves*," that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

32. Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers.

The four last verses may be considered as one sentence, relating to one subject. They may be thus paraphrased : "Wo to you, Pharisaic Scribes : for you wish to appear to set a high value upon the prophets and other servants of God, whose monuments you ostentatiously repair ; declaring that if you had lived in the times of your fathers, you would not have joined with them in putting such excellent persons to death. In saying you are the children of those who murdered the prophets, there is more truth than you will be willing to allow : for you are truly their sons, not so much by birth, as by disposition : for while you pretend to disapprove of the deeds of your fathers, you are meditating the same things which they did. You honour the dead, because they do not

oppose you ; but you thirst with unsatiable malice after the blood of the living prophets, who are teaching the same doctrine which their predecessors taught, only more perfectly. Complete then, as you appear determined to do, what might remain deficient in the wickedness of your ancestors, that the wrath of God may come upon you to the uttermost.

33. Ye serpents, ye generation, “*ye brood*,” of vipers : how can ye escape the damnation, “*the punishment*,” of hell ?

Since you possess all the malignity of the most venomous creatures, how is it possible for you to escape not only severe punishment in this life, but also the severer punishment of a future state ?

34. Wherefore, *i. e. that ye may bring all this to pass*, behold I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes ; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify ; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city.

Christ here refers to his sending persons to preach the gospel to the Jews ; and he calls them by names which were familiar to his countrymen, to intimate that they would not be inferior in wisdom and divine gifts, to those who were most esteemed among their teachers. He foretels, at the same time, how cruelly they would be treated by the Jews ; a prediction, which has been fully verified by the history of the apostles and first preachers of Christianity. In sending these persons to the Jews, Christ was influenced by a desire to exert every possible means for their conversion, or to leave them inexcusable, if, after all, they should remain impenitent.

35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

You shall be permitted to do these things, that you may be punished with a severity which your sins have merited ; which shall be so exemplary, that God shall appear to be reckoning with you for all the righteous blood which has been shed from the beginning of the world. The Zacharias here referred to was the son of Jehoiada, the high-priest, who was put to death in the court of the house of the Lord, or between the sanctuary and the altar which stood in a court, in the open air. See 2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21. The words, “son of Barachias,” seem to have been the addition of some ignorant transcriber, who knew no other Zachariah than the prophet of that name, who was the son of Barachias. This appears to be confirmed by Luke’s not having these words. Luke xi. 51. When Christ speaks of the righteous blood, from Abel to Zacharias, he probably uses a proverbial expression, naturally arising from

Abel's being the first person of whom we have an account in Scripture, as unjustly put to death ; and from Zacharias being the last.

36. Verily I say unto you, All these things, "*all this blood,*" shall come upon this generation.

How dreadfully this threatening was verified, and how well the Jews merited such severity, we may learn from Josephus,* in his history of the Jewish war ; who says that, in his opinion, all the calamities which all other nations ever suffered, fell far short of those endured by the Jews ; and that as no nation ever suffered such things, so, no generation was ever more wicked than that ; and that if the Romans had stopped their hands from destroying those profligate wretches, the city, he believed, would have been destroyed by some opening of the earth, or by some deluge, or by such a fire as had laid Sodom in ruin. As there were no more than forty years from the time when Christ delivered these words, to the destruction of Jerusalem, he might justly say that the calamities which he had been mentioning, should come upon that generation, many of whom would live to see them.

37. O Jerusalem ! Jerusalem ! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee : how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen, "*a bird,*" gathereth her chickens, "*her young,*" under her wings ; and ye would not !

Christ having in the preceding verses mentioned the guilt of the Scribes, and foretold the punishments which were coming upon them, his heart is melted into compassion at a prospect of the calamities which his countrymen were to endure in the city of Jerusalem ; and he breaks out into this pathetic lamentation over them. It does not appear from the first three evangelists that Jesus was more than once at Jerusalem, namely, the time when he was crucified ; but John has recorded four visits which he made thither, besides this. (John ii. 23. ; v. 1. ; vii. 10. ; x. 22.) On these occasions he had laboured earnestly, by his miracles and public instructions, to bring the inhabitants to repentance, and to induce them to become his disciples, that he might hereby avert the dreadful calamities with which they were threatened : so that his concern to save them might be compared with that of a bird for her young, who, when they are threatened with a storm, or any other danger, shelters them under her wings : but these kind endeavours were rendered ineffectual by the obstinacy of the Jews, and Christ now laments their folly. Jerusalem had so often been the scene of the execution of the prophets, that it had grown into a kind of proverb, that a prophet could not perish elsewhere ; hence it is that Jesus says, Luke xiii. 33, "for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."

38. Behold ! your house is left unto you desolate.

* Joseph. de Bell. Jud. Proem. i. 4. lib. v. 10, 5. lib. v. xiii.

As Christ was now in the temple, it seems most natural to refer these words to that building, and not, as some have done, to the Jewish commonwealth; and to consider him as saying that the house in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem gloried so much, and to which they looked as their security, was now forsaken by him, and left to its fate, and that he would do nothing more to preserve it.

39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Christ here explains more fully what he had only intimated in the preceding verse — that he should leave their temple, and that they should never see him any more. He alludes here to the acclamations of the multitude, when he came in triumph into Jerusalem; on which occasion they cried, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;” acknowledging him hereby as the Messiah. (Matt. xxi. 9.; xi. 3.) To say, therefore, that they should never see him, until they applied to him that language, was the same thing as saying that they should never see him at all: for he well knew that these Scribes would never acknowledge him as the Messiah. We have a similar mode of expression, Matt. v. 26, “Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing,” i. e. thou shalt never come out at all.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE see how easy it is for men to profess respect for the dead, while they persecute the living of the same character. The Scribes professed the highest respect for the ancient martyrs to the truth: they did every thing in their power to preserve and perpetuate their memory, by erecting sumptuous monuments over their sepulchres: they condemned their ancestors for putting the prophets to death, and imagined that if they had lived in their time, they should not have joined with them in committing such unjust actions. Yet their conduct towards Christ and his apostles plainly showed that they were actuated by the same malicious spirit, and that they would have been the most forward to do what they now condemned. So little do men know what is in their own hearts: for how was it that Jesus incurred the implacable hatred of the Scribes, but by exposing the errors and censuring the vices of the age in which he lived, of which they were the principal encouragers and promoters—the very services which the ancient prophets performed in their day, and by which they brought on their own death?

We have occasion to observe, in other men, the same inconsistency as appears in these Scribes. The advocates of the sacred rights of conscience, and the steady opposers of human authority in matters of religion, have their warmest applause: they profess to admire their writings, and to respect the memorial of their per-

sons ; but those who act upon the same principles, and tread in the same steps, are deemed men of a proud, obstinate, turbulent, sour spirit, who ought to be discountenanced and opposed. The cause of this inconsistency in both instances is the same. Men profess respect for the dead, not because they feel any, but because they hope to gain applause hereby, by concurring with the sentiments of others : they dislike and censure the living, because they support a cause to which they do not wish success, and because their zeal and earnestness are an indirect reflection upon their own conduct.

2. We learn that there is a certain degree of wickedness, beyond which nations will not be allowed to go unpunished. The Jews were under a particular providence, which rendered them prosperous or afflicted, in exact proportion as they observed the law of God or neglected it. When they were guilty of great crimes, they were speedily visited with grievous punishment. This they had constantly experienced to be the plan of the divine government towards them, ever since they had been erected into a commonwealth. When, therefore, the new and extraordinary means which God employed for their reformation were rejected by them ; when to all the crimes of their ancestors they added that of persecuting, and putting to death Jesus and his apostles, the divine messengers who were sent to instruct and save them ; they discovered the greatest hardness of heart, and as their guilt was enormous, their punishment was severe : their government was overturned, their city was laid waste, and the remnant of the miserable inhabitants driven into every nation under heaven. Let not other nations, who are left to the general conduct of Providence, imagine that they are exempt from similar calamities : it is the invariable law of the divine government, that national vices produce national judgments. Whenever there is a corrupt system of religion, or of civil government ; where men obstinately refuse to reform both, and instead of listening to those who point out these corruptions, and warn them of their danger, persecute and put them to death, there will be one day, sooner or later, great confusion and disorder. Men thus bring upon themselves tremendous sufferings ; as if the great judge of the earth were punishing them for all the righteous blood shed in their country, from the foundation of the world.

3. We have here a striking example of the benevolence and humanity of Christ. When speaking of the vices and hypocrisy of the Scribes, there appears an asperity in his language, which approaches to harshness ; not arising from any malevolence of temper, but from an honest indignation ; yet, when he comes to speak of the sufferings of this unhappy people, his heart melts into compassion ; he forgets the injuries they were now intending, and would afterwards commit, against himself, and nothing has place in his breast but pity for the sufferers. And is it for Jerusalem that he thus weeps ; the city where his most inveterate enemies resided, and which was to be the scene of his cruel crucifixion and death ? How great is the magnanimity of the Saviour ! One might suppose from his language that it was for a friend or a brother. Thus

let us learn to weep over the follies of those who may hate and persecute us for our attachment to the cause of truth and righteousness : it is they, and not we, who are the objects of pity. The calamities to which they expose themselves are much greater than those which they inflict upon us.

SECTION LVIII.

Jesus declares the signs which should precede the destruction of Jerusalem.

MATTHEW xxiv. 1—14.

1. AND Jesus went out, and departed, “*having gone out, was departing,*” from the temple ; and his disciples came to him, for to show him the buildings of the temple.

Christ, having told the Jews, at the close of the last chapter, that their temple was left desolate, his disciples wished to show him how noble a building that was, the destruction of which he had pronounced.

2. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things ? “*Do ye gaze on all these things ?*”* Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

To show the fulfilment of this prophecy, it would be sufficient to prove that the temple was utterly destroyed ; but it seems also to have been literally accomplished : for Josephus tells us (Bell. Jud. vii. 1. 1.) that Titus, the Roman general, ordered his soldiers to dig up and demolish the whole city and the temple, except three towers, which he left standing, that posterity might from them judge of what extent and strength the city had been. Another Jewish writer farther informs us (Taanith of Maimonides, c. iv. 7.) that the very foundations of the temple were digged up, and that Terentius, a Roman commander, carried a plough over them, according to the Roman custom. Such an event as this was extremely improbable, and could be foreseen only by divine prescience, at this time, when Jerusalem and the country of Judæa were in profound peace, and the temple existed in full strength and magnificence.

3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the

* Omitting the negative upon the authority of many versions.

sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world, "*the end of the age*?"

When Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple, his disciples probably imagined that he would come again, to accomplish it as a punishment upon his enemies, and to establish that glorious temporal kingdom which they expected under the Messiah. It was to this they referred, when they asked what would be the sign of his coming; supposing that that event would be preceded by some extraordinary appearances, which might foretel his approach, and, if they were acquainted with them, fill their minds with joy, whenever they were seen. The end of the world, or, as it is better rendered, *the end of the age*, was an expression synonymous to the coming of Christ: for the disciples supposed that whenever the Messiah assumed his temporal authority, he would destroy the political œconomy which then subsisted, under which they were governed by Roman procurators, and establish a form of government of a very different nature. This would appear a desirable change to the Jews: the disciples inquired, therefore, when it would take place. The phrase which is here translated "*the end of the world*," is applied, in other parts of Scripture, to the end of particular dispensations of religion. Thus it is said of Christ, Heb. ix. 26, "But now once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself:" i. e. not at the destruction of the world; for that was not then arrived; but at the end of the ages or dispensations of religion; such as the Antediluvian, the Patriarchal, the Mosaic. The same phrase may, without any violence, be applied to the end of a political period, or to the termination of the government of the Romans over the Jews, which had now lasted a long time, and to which Christ was expected to put an end. That Christ did not understand the question of his disciples to refer to the time of the end of the world, is evident from his answer, which he concludes with saying, verse 34, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled:" whence it appears that the end of the age must be something which was to take place during the lifetime of persons then living.

4. And Jesus answered, and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

The disciples had asked Jesus what were the signs of his coming to destroy the temple, and to put an end to their political government, and he is now going to mention some that were immediate, and others more remote. Before he does this, he thinks proper to caution them against being deceived: for as they entertained mistaken notions of the nature of that kingdom which he was coming to establish, he knew that they were liable to be misled, by considering those things as signs of his approach which were not really so, and especially by admitting the claims of certain deceivers, who pretended to be the Christ, appearing again in the world.

5. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, "*I am the Christ*," and shall deceive many.

What the Jews expected the Messiah to do for them was, to deliver them from the Roman yoke, and render them an independent people : whoever, therefore, promised to perform these services, was considered as assuming the character of the Christ, and as coming in his name. That there were many impostors, who asserted that they were Christ, in that sense of the word, is evident from the book of Acts,* where we read of Theudas, who boasted himself to be somebody, but was slain, and all those who joined themselves to him, to the number of four hundred men ; and of Judas of Galilee, and of an Egyptian, who made similar pretensions, and perished with their followers in the same miserable manner. The same thing is also mentioned by Josephus,† as done by deceivers, under a pretence of divine inspiration.

6. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars ; see that ye be not troubled : for all these things must come to pass : but the end is not yet.

These are the next things which Christ mentions as preceding the destruction of the Jewish republic—wars and the rumours of wars. The wars may refer to the great convulsions which took place in the Roman empire before the destruction of Jerusalem ; but more probably, to the commotions which prevailed in Palestine itself, or at least, in the neighbouring regions, which were very numerous during that period. When the emperor Caligula ordered his statues to be placed in the temple at Jerusalem, six years after the death of Christ, the Jews refused to suffer it, and their obstinacy was ordered to be overcome by force of arms. On this occasion so strong was the rumour of war, and so general the expectation of hostilities, that the inhabitants left their lands uncultivated. The seasonable death of the emperor, however, prevented matters from coming to this issue. During these wars, or rumours of wars, Christ exhorts his disciples not to be alarmed, as if the final destruction of the Jewish state was near : for that many things were to take place before that event.

7. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom ; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

The rising of nation against nation may refer to the disturbance which took place between the Jews and the heathens, in the different cities in which they resided, throughout the Roman empire, which happened first at Cæsarea, then at Scythopolis, Ptolemais, Tyre, Gadara ; at Alexandria and Damascus. The rising of kingdom against kingdom may refer to the contests which took place between the different governments into which Palestine was divided. That there were famines during this period, we learn from

* Acts v. 36, 37. ; xxi. 38.

† Bell. Jud. ii. 13, 14, &c.

heathen writers, and even from the Scriptures : for we are told, Acts xi. 28, that Agabus signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world, (which probably means no more than Judæa,) which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Pestilences usually accompany famines, being the common effect of bad or insufficient food. There were earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos ; in all which places there were a great number of Jewish inhabitants. Josephus tells us of an earthquake, which happened at the time the Idumeans were encamped on the outside of Jerusalem.

8. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

The word which we render sorrows, signifies the pains of child-bearing, which are slight at first, in comparison of what they become afterwards. Our Lord, therefore, meant to intimate that these evils were inconsiderable, when compared to those which were approaching.

9. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you ; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

Here our Lord foretels the persecutions to which his disciples would be exposed, both from their countrymen and from other nations. Of the former we have an account in the book of Acts ; and of the other, from the Roman historians, particularly from Tacitus, who describes the persecutions of Nero, by whom Peter and Paul were put to death, and in whose time the war against the Jews commenced. What rendered Christians so obnoxious to heathens was their refusing to join in the worship of their gods, which they represented as no gods, entitled to no degree of respect.

10. And then shall many be offended, *i. e. fall off from the profession of the Christian religion*, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

The natural consequence of persecution is to lead many who were slightly attached to Christianity, to abandon it through fear, and to make their peace with their enemies, by betraying their friends, which must produce mutual animosity.

11. And many false prophets, "*false teachers*," shall rise, and shall deceive many.

These false teachers seem to be different from those mentioned in verse 5th, who are said to come in the name of Christ, and who promised to the Jews civil deliverance. These were persons who corrupted the Christian religion, by introducing false doctrines into it. Such were Hymenus and Philetus, who said that the resurrection was already passed, and those who represented external worship as a matter of indifference, and allowed themselves to join in worship with idolaters ; those who said that Christ had not a human body, and did not suffer in reality, but only in appearance ;

and several others who are mentioned or referred to in the apostolic writings.

12. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

The attachment of many to the Christian religion will be destroyed, when they experience the cruelties practised by its adversaries.

13. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

He that shall persevere in the profession of Christianity, notwithstanding all the evils of persecution, shall be saved from the calamities impending over the Jews. Christ here foretels the safety of Christians at the destruction of Jerusalem. Accordingly, we learn from Eusebius, that the Christians of Jerusalem, being warned by a revelation, meaning probably the prophecy now delivered concerning the approaching war, departed from the city, and went to dwell in a town named Pella, on the other side Jordan.

14. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, *i. e. all the Roman empire*, for a witness unto all nations ; and then shall the end come, *i. e. the end of the Jewish state and polity*.

The persecutions raised against Christians shall disperse my disciples, and be the means of diffusing the knowledge of my religion throughout the earth.

REFLECTIONS.

1. LET Christians apply to themselves the language which Christ addresses to his disciples : “ Whenever ye hear of wars and rumours of wars, see that ye be not troubled : for all these things must come to pass ; ” they are links in the chain of causes and effects ; they are necessary means for accomplishing the purposes of Divine Providence, which employs them for the same ends in the moral world, as storms and tempests in the natural—to rectify disorders which have arisen ; to open a way of greater regularity and tranquillity in future. Let no one, therefore, be offended at them ; let no one imagine, when such calamities are produced, that God has abandoned all care of his offspring, and left them to the workings of their own evil passions ; he still presides in the storm, and secretly directs it for advancing his own purposes ; he brings good out of evil, and order out of confusion. Let us repose our cares and our fears upon his mighty arm. Blessed is the man, who, in such circumstances, has the God of Jacob for his refuge, who can look through second causes and inferior agents, to the Great First Mover.

2. If Christians suffer, on account of their attachment to their religious principles ; if they are persecuted by enemies, forsaken and betrayed by friends and relatives, let them not be surprised or offended ; no new thing has happened to them. Such was the lot of the first professors of Christianity ; it was foreseen and foretold by their divine Master, who says that to be hated of all nations for his name sake, would be the characteristic or distinguishing mark of his disciples ; such was the lot of that Master himself, and surely it ought to satisfy the disciple, if he be as his Master, and the servant, if he be as his Lord. To quarrel with our religious principles, because they expose us to sufferings, is to dislike them for that which ought to recommend them to our esteem : it is an honourable, although involuntary, testimony to their truth and excellence ; for calumny and persecution have always accompanied the truth ; whereas error and folly have been courted and applauded. Wo unto you, says Christ, when all men speak well of you !

3. We may observe the wisdom of Providence, in suffering the Jewish state to continue until the gospel had been preached in all the world. This was necessary for communicating it to all nations with sufficient evidence. The historical facts on which the truth of the Christian religion depends, receive great confirmation from the opposition made to it by the Jews, and from their persecuting, with the greatest severity, those who made a profession of it : for it cannot but appear a strong proof of the truth of the gospel history, that the most important particulars contained in it were never called in question by the people among whom they were said to have happened, notwithstanding they rejected the gospel, and persecuted its preachers. It would hence appear also, that it was not, what most other religions had been, a political engine : since it was embraced without the sanction, and in opposition to the opinion, of the ruling power. Thus, through the fall of the Jews, as the apostle expresses it, salvation is come to the Gentiles : had the Jews generally embraced Christianity, this would have proved a great stumbling-block to the Gentiles.

SECTION LIX.

Continuation of the prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem.

MATTHEW xxiv. 15—23.

15. WHEN ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, (whoso readeth let him understand.)

Our Lord, having mentioned the remote signs of the destruction

of the Jewish city and government, in the preceding verses, now mentions some that were more immediate. By the abomination of desolation, we are to understand, the Roman standards, which had images of the gods and the emperors fixed in them, and were the objects of adoration to the soldiers. These were, therefore, an abomination to Jews, on account of their detestation of idolatry. They gave them so much offence, that in peaceable times the Romans entered Jerusalem without them; and Vitellius, at the request of some eminent Jews, avoided marching his forces through Judæa, on account of these ensigns. They are called the abomination of desolation, because desolation accompanied the Roman standards wherever they went. These standards are spoken of under this appellation by the prophet Daniel, ix. 27, and in other places of the same prophet. When these were seen in the holy place, i. e. in the territory round about Jerusalem, which was called holy from its vicinity to Jerusalem, denominated the holy city on account of its containing the temple of God,—they were to be regarded as the signal for flight. The words added in a parenthesis, *let him that readeth understand*, were probably introduced by Matthew, the author of this book, who wrote it about the time these things began to be accomplished, and wished to direct the attention of Christians to this prophecy.

16. Then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains.

There is here a reference to the case of Lot, who, when he departed from Sodom, fled for security to the mountains. In like manner, Christ exhorts the inhabitants of Judæa to flee to the mountains, when they saw Jerusalem encompassed with armies: for there would be no security for them in any place to which the Roman army could come. They were directed to do this also with the greatest expedition, which is here represented by several strong figures.

17. Let him which is on the house-top not come down, to take any thing out of his house.

The roofs of the houses of Judæa were not like ours, but flat, and used for walking and retirement. From these roofs there were stairs to descend, on the outside, without coming into the house. As a man who is in danger of being immediately arrested comes not down into the house, to carry away with him any of the furniture, but descends by the shortest way, and flees for his life; so let him do, who observes these signals of approaching calamity.

18. Neither let him which is in the field return back, to take his clothes.

The Jews, when they set themselves to work in the field, laid aside their cloak or upper garment, as an incumbrance; but so great was the speed which our Lord would have them use, on the present occasion, that he exhorts them not to turn back to fetch it, although lying near them in the field.

19. And wo unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days.

As nothing but the speediest flight could save them from destruction, Christ laments over the condition of those who, by such hindrances as those here mentioned, would be prevented from escaping. Thus he endeavours to convince his disciples of the necessity of an immediate retreat, as soon as the signs before recited should appear.

20. But pray ye, “*and pray ye*,” that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath-day.

To represent to them the necessity of a speedy flight, he urges them to pray that it might not be in the winter, when the shortness of the day, the badness of the roads, and the great cold, would prevent them from travelling fast, or endanger their lives: nor on the sabbath, when their superstitious regard to that day would prevent them from going far; a sabbath-day's journey being no more than two miles. The climate of Judæa, although very warm in summer, was subject to a very considerable degree of cold in winter, on account of the great rains which fell at that season. Hence we read in Ezra x. 9, that the people, in a public assembly held in the open air at that time of the year, trembled for the great rain; and William of Tyre informs us, that the troops of Saladin, after a defeat in the country of Judæa, perished through cold.*

21. For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

These words must be limited to the people of whom Christ is here speaking, the Jews; and then they will signify, that the calamities undergone by them were unparalleled in their history; and will remain so. The evils arising from their own distractions and intestine fury, which were the principal source of their calamities were peculiar to this time. From Josephus, who has written a minute account of the siege, we learn that the fury of the opposite factions within the city was so great, that they filled all places, even the temple itself, with continual slaughters; nay, to such a pitch did their madness rise, that they destroyed the very granaries of corn which should have sustained them, and burnt the magazine of arms which should have defended them. By this means, when the siege had lasted but two months, a famine began to rage, which reduced them to such extremities, that mothers ate their own children. From the beginning of the siege to the taking of the city, there were destroyed, by faction, by famine, by pestilence, and by the enemy, no less than eleven hundred thousand in Jerusalem. To these must be added, two hundred and thirty-seven thousand four hundred and ninety, of whom express mention is made by this historian, as being destroyed in other places, besides innumerable others, not subject to calculation, who were swept away

by fatigue, famine, disease, and every kind of wretchedness and violence. The number of captives, throughout the whole war, was ninety-seven thousand.

22. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

By the elect, we are here to understand the Jewish nation, who are called God's chosen or elect people. Thus the prophet Isaiah, when speaking of Cyrus, xlv. 4, says, "for Jacob's my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name;" and the meaning of this verse is, that so fast were the Jews destroyed, that if their calamities had continued but a little longer, the whole nation would have been exterminated; but that God, out of regard to the people whom he had chosen from all nations to be his own, shortened the period of their sufferings, that a remnant might be saved, for accomplishing the future purposes of his divine Providence. Or the elect may here signify Christians, who are often called the *elect*, or chosen people of God, in the New Testament, as the Jews are in the Old. In this sense the word elect seems to be used a little below, in the 24th verse. If this should be the true interpretation, then the meaning will be, that God spared the Jews, by shortening the period of their calamities, for the sake of the benefit which Christians should derive from the existence and testimony of this people; which many writers have shown to be very valuable.

23. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo here is Christ, or there, believe it not.

24. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show, *rather* "give,"* great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. *i. e. Christians themselves.*

Christ had foretold the appearance of false Christs, in the 5th verse of this chapter, as among the distant signs and forerunners of the destruction of Jerusalem: he now mentions it as the immediate attendant of that event. He also says, that they should undertake the double office of being Christs, or deliverers of the people from the Romans, and prophets, or inspired persons; and that they should propose great wonders or miracles, in confirmation of the justness of their claims. In all these particulars, the truth of Christ's prediction is proved by the testimony of Josephus, the Jewish historian: for according to him, there were several persons who pretended to divine inspiration, some years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and at that period; inducing people to follow them, by promises of working miracles; one of them, Theudas, saying that he would dry up the river Jordan; and

* They did not really perform or exhibit them; but only promised or undertook to produce such signs.

another that he would cause the walls of Jerusalem to fall down.* The nearer the Jews were to destruction, the more did these impostors multiply, and the more easy credit did they find with those who were willing to have their miseries softened by hope. Even during the conflagration of the temple, a false prophet encouraged the people with pretended miraculous signs of deliverance. The Jewish Christians themselves were very unwilling to give up all hope of deliverance from their subjection to the Romans: this accounts for the language of Christ, when he speaks of the danger which the *elect* were in of being deceived by these impostors; and shows his wisdom and goodness in forewarning them against trusting to the fallacious promises of persons who affirmed, confidently, that they were divinely raised up, to accomplish such a deliverance.

25. Behold I have told you before.

Christ desires his disciples to recollect, that he had forewarned them of their danger, that they might be upon their guard against these impostors.

26. Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold he is in the desert, go not forth; Behold he is in the secret chambers, believe it not.

Christ here mentions the very places where these deceivers would appear, and Josephus tells us, that impostors, under pretence of a divine inspiration, endeavoured to introduce novelty and change, and raised the common people to such a degree of madness, that they drew them forth into the desert, pretending that God would there make them see the tokens of liberty, i. e. of their being rescued from the Roman yoke. He also mentions some who appeared in the secret chambers, or places of security in the city.

27. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

In this passage, Christ does not seem to refer to any thing which he had said in the preceding verse, but to assign the reason for the exhortation which he had given them in verses 16, 17, and 18, to flee from Jerusalem and the plain country, with the utmost speed: for, says he, the calamities which I shall bring with me at my appearing, will be as rapid and extensive as the lightning, which no sooner appears in the east, than it shines to the west. Flatter not yourselves, therefore, with the hopes of escaping, if you delay your flight, or only remove to a small distance: for I shall instantaneously visit the whole country.

28. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

* Farmer on Miracles, pp. 305, 306.

Wherever mine enemies are, there will I visit and apprehend them, as the eagle seizes his prey. In this there may perhaps be an allusion to the Roman standards, which were eagles.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the sufferings of the Jews we see the natural effects of a vicious character upon a people. Where men have been bred up in false notions of religion by corrupt teachers; where they have been taught to consider it as consisting not in pious affections, and in the discharge of moral duties, but in the observance of rites and ceremonies; there we must expect that the character will be corrupt, and the manners vicious; that there will be much pride, insolence, and sensuality, in prosperity; and much dissension, injustice, and cruelty, when the passions are roused by adversity.

Such was the conduct of the Jews, and such will be the conduct of other nations, when corrupted by the same means, and reduced to the like circumstances of distress. Let them, therefore, take warning from the example of this people; and if they wish to avoid the same fate, let them remove the causes which necessarily lead to it.

2. We have here an example of the mercy as well as of the severity of God; of his severity, in destroying so many thousands of the human race who had corrupted themselves and their religion, and in suffering them to perish by such dreadful means: of his mercy, in permitting a remnant to live, although they had deserved the same punishment, to be the objects of his future beneficence. Thus God never forgets the principles of benevolence, when most provoked by the sins of his people; or the covenant wherein he has promised never to suffer his goodness utterly to depart from them. Let us bless him that this remnant still subsists, as an incontrovertible evidence to Christians of the truth of their religion, and a solemn warning not to abuse their privileges; since no advantages of this kind, which they may enjoy, will save them from the judgments of God; and let us pray that the season may soon come, when God may remove from this oppressed and afflicted people the marks of his displeasure, under which they at present lie, and restore them to his favour and their country again. In the mean time,

3. Let us behave towards Jews with tenderness and humanity. If their fathers stained their hands with the blood of our Master, and that of his followers; If they were guilty of a great crime in rejecting the Messiah, and their descendants still persist in the same unhappy delusion; these circumstances can afford us no just reason for regarding them with abhorrence, or treating them with cruelty: they are objects of pity, rather than of hatred, as men who have fallen into a pernicious error. To suppose that we are authorized to treat them with severity, because they have been treated with severity by God, is to put ourselves into the place of

God, and to suppose, that whatever is right for him to do, is equally right for us. To deprive them of all civil rights, and to behave towards them, as if they were unworthy of any place in society, is to make them thus unworthy; for we take away from them one powerful motive to behave well, the desire of preserving a good name: it is to confirm their prejudices against the Christian religion, by impressing them with a sense of unjust treatment. Let us rather study, by kindness and confidence, to secure their good-will to ourselves and to the gospel, that their minds may be open to the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah.

SECTION LX.

Continuation of the prophecy respecting the destruction of Jerusalem.

MATTHEW xxiv. 29—42.

29. IMMEDIATELY after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

In this figurative language Jesus foretels the overthrow of the Jewish state, both ecclesiastical and political, which was to take place immediately after the distresses which he had before mentioned, and to accompany the destruction of Jerusalem. Such language was common with the prophets, when they foretold the destruction of cities or states. Thus the prophet Isaiah, xiii. 10, 13, when speaking of the destruction of Babylon says, "The stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their lights; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts." Joy and prosperity, on the other hand, are prefigured by an increase of light in the sun and the moon. Thus the same prophet says, xxx. 26, "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of the wound." The reason for using this language is obvious; as the sun and moon are sources of great benefit and comfort to mankind, the darkness of these luminaries is a fit emblem to represent any great calamity, such as the destruction of a city, or the overthrow of an empire. The powers of the heavens, here mentioned, signify the same thing as the host of heaven, in other parts of Scripture, or the heavenly bodies.

30. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, *i. e. a proof of his being or dwelling in heaven.*

When the Jewish state was in being, and the Jewish rulers lived in prosperity, the disciples of Jesus were persecuted, and their Master seemed to lie under the infamy brought upon him by his execution as a malefactor: he still suffered the disgrace of the cross, and appeared to be in a state of degradation; but when the Jewish people and government were thus severely punished for crucifying and rejecting the Messiah, it appeared that Christ was in a state of the highest favour with God: his cause obtained a most signal triumph; his wrongs were completely avenged; and he himself was exalted to heaven. To be exalted to heaven, is a proverbial expression among the Jews, for a state of prosperity and honour, which has already occurred in the language of Christ, when speaking of Capernaum: We are not to be surprised, therefore, to find him applying it to himself here, and saying that the destruction of Jerusalem would afford evident proof that he was in heaven.

And then shall all the tribes of the earth, "*of the land,*" *i. e. Judæa*, mourn.

The calamities which the Jews, not only of Jerusalem, but of the land of Judæa, shall suffer from the invasion of the Romans, and the total destruction of their government, shall cause them great grief.

And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

My great power and glory shall be as conspicuously displayed by the destruction of Jerusalem, and the other circumstances which will accompany that event, as if they saw me coming upon the clouds of heaven, to punish my enemies. When the prophet Isaiah represents God as about to punish the Egyptians, he speaks of him as riding upon a swift cloud for that purpose, Isaiah xix. 1. In that case there was no visible appearance of Jehovah upon a cloud; but it was language which the prophet adopted, in order to express the evident hand of God in the calamities of Egypt. The same thing may be said of the language of Christ upon the present occasion.

Some persons, indeed, understand Christ here to foretel his own visible appearance in the clouds of heaven, for the destruction of the Jewish nation: in the same manner as he shall appear at the day of judgment; but there is no occasion for such an interpretation. It is a virtual, not a personal appearance, of which he here speaks: he has referred to it more than once, during the course of his ministry. Thus, when sending forth his apostles, he says, Matt. x. 23, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man come," *i. e.* not before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Matt. xvi. 28, "Verily I say unto you, "There be some standing here, who shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom;" meaning hereby, that some of his apostles should live to see the destruction of Jerusalem, which was actually the case. It is to this he refers when he says to Peter, "If I will that he," *i. e. John*, "tarry till I come, wha

is that to thee?" John lived to behold this metaphorical coming of Christ.

From the similarity of the language in which this coming of Christ is here foretold, it has been supposed that Christ, in these two verses, describes his appearance for the last judgment; for he is then to come in the clouds of heaven: but as the passages just quoted show there was to be a coming of Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem, and he is here speaking upon that subject, it is most natural to refer what he says to that event: he himself, also, expressly limits us to it, when he says, a little below, "that that generation should not pass, until all these things, of which he had been before speaking, be fulfilled."

31. And he shall send his angels, "*his messengers*," with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

By the elect, we are here to understand converts to the Christian religion, who are now the chosen people of God, as the Jews were of old; by his messengers, improperly rendered *angels*, the preachers of the gospel; and by the great sound of the trumpet, the public invitations and exhortations of these preachers: for as the trumpet was the instrument employed by the Jews to call the people to their public assemblies, the sound of this instrument would naturally be used for a public summons, although delivered by the word of men. The meaning of Christ in this verse, then, is to foretel, that when the opposition before made to the Christian religion by the Jews should cease, by the overthrow of their power, he should send forth his preachers to every quarter of the globe, and that their labours should be attended with new and greater efficacy, in making proselytes. That this verse cannot be a prophecy of what would take place at the final judgment, is evident from the reasons already assigned.

32. Now learn a parable, "*the comparison*," of the fig-tree. When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.

33. So, likewise, ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, "*he*," *i. e. the Son of man*, "*is near*," even at the doors.

The disciples had asked Jesus what would be the sign of his coming, and of the end of the age: in answer to these questions, he had mentioned several appearances, which would mark the approach of the event about which they were inquiring. These he now teaches them to regard, not as distant presages, but immediate forerunners; just in the same manner as the appearance of leaves upon the fig-tree, a tree common in Judæa, was considered the speedy approach of summer.

34. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

The destruction of Jerusalem took place about thirty-seven years from the time at which these words were delivered ; so that several who then heard him, might live to behold the event. This passage shows that the whole of the preceding prophecy relates to the same subject ; and that those must be mistaken who apply any part of it to the day of final judgment.

35. Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but my words shall not pass away.

Christ does not here mean to assert that heaven and earth should pass away, or be destroyed ; but that this event should sooner take place, than the prophecies which he now delivered fail of their accomplishment : for that they would certainly be fulfilled. A similar expression in Matt. v. 18, “ for till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the law, until all be fulfilled,” is explained by Luke, xvi. 17, by saying, “ heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one jot or tittle of the law fail.”

36. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, “ *no one* ;” no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Jesus had mentioned many forerunners of the event, by which they might be sure of its approach ; but as the disciples would wish to know the exact time, he tells them that this was known to the Father only ; which plainly implies, what indeed is asserted by Mark in direct words, that it was unknown to the Son. “ But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son*, but the Father.” Mark xiii. 32. This is a proof, amongst many others, that Jesus Christ is not the one God : for had he been so, he must have known the particular time when the destruction of Jerusalem would take place. To suppose that Jesus said this of his human, and not of his divine nature ; and that one might know what the other was ignorant of, is to attribute a mental reservation to our Saviour, fit only for a Jesuit.*

37. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

There will be the same security and unconcern about the coming of the Son of man, among the Jews, as there was in the antediluvian world about the deluge.

38. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark ;

39. And knew not, *i. e.* “ *did not consider*,” until

* See Emlyn's Tracts, (1719,) p. 19.

the flood came, and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

There would be the same carelessness, when the Son of man came to punish the Jewish nation, as among the inhabitants of the world before the flood, who, notwithstanding the warnings of Noah that unless they repented they would be destroyed, lived in perfect security, pursuing their pleasures, and thinking of future settlements. The disciples were to trust, therefore, to the predictions of Christ, rather than to the expectations of those around them, who might imagine themselves most secure, when they were nearest to danger.

40. Then shall two be in the field ; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41. Two women shall be grinding at the mill ; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

In these two verses, our Lord declares that the condition of persons who appeared to be exactly alike, who were in the same place, and engaged in the same employment, shall, in consequence of the disposals of Providence, or the effects of forewarning, be very different : for that one shall be destroyed, while the other is left. The unbelieving Jew shall be destroyed with his unbelieving countrymen ; but the Christian, although placed in the same situation with the other, shall be preserved. Since no conclusion, then, could be drawn from external appearances, there was the more ground for watchfulness.*

42. Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

REFLECTIONS.

1. IF the words of Christ cannot fail, there is much ground both for joy and fear. What gives assurance of truth and stability to the declarations of Christ respecting future events, is, that they are founded not upon his own authority : for of some things, by his own confession, he was ignorant ; but upon the authority of God, who cannot wilfully deceive us, or be himself mistaken. Men, indeed, are ignorant of future events, and know not what must be on the morrow ; but he is as well acquainted with the future as with the present and past : for it is knowing no more than what he intends, or has resolved to do at a particular time : and although men may change their intentions, or be prevented from executing them by events which they did not expect, or could not

* Dr. Shaw, in his travels into the East, tells us, that most families grind their wheat or barley at home, having two portable mill-stones for that purpose ; that when expedition is required, two persons assist in the operation ; and that it is usual for women only to do this business. Shaw's Travels, pp. 231, 296, 297. fol. This shows the propriety of what our Lord here says, about two women being in the mill.

avoid, nothing can occur to alter the mind of God, or to hinder him from accomplishing his purposes. The word of the Lord, and, therefore, the word of Christ, abideth for ever.

We have, in the words of Christ, then, a firm foundation on which to build our hopes of those future blessings which he has promised or predicted to his followers. Has he foretold that he will raise them all from the grave ; that he will place them in a new state of existence, with himself, where they shall enjoy uninterrupted pleasure throughout an eternal duration ? He will certainly fulfil what he has promised : he had the authority of God for making the promise, who will enable him to accomplish it.

Rejoice, Christians, in the prospect which lies before you : nothing can be more glorious or better founded. A never-ending existence of perpetually increasing happiness, is a good beyond all calculation or conception : it is almost too great to be believed. It might be deemed presumption in such sinful and imperfect creatures as we are, to hope for it ; yet is it ensured to you by the best of all securities, the promise of God, delivered by his Son and messenger, Jesus Christ ; and sooner shall all nature be torn from its foundation, and God destroy the fair creation which he has formed, than any of his words be suffered to pass away, without being fulfilled.

What is ground of joy to good men is just reason of alarm to the wicked. The threatenings of Christ are built upon the same foundation as his promises, and are equally infallible. The day of final judgment will come, as well as the day of the destruction of Jerusalem, when wicked men shall be separated from the righteous, and go to a place of punishment. Let sinners hear this and tremble !

2. Let us apply to ourselves the exhortation to watchfulness which our Lord gives his disciples, respecting his coming for the destruction of Jerusalem. In many respects, our situation, in regard to a future judgment, resembles theirs, in respect to that event. We know not, any more than they, when our Lord will come, and we are liable to be deceived by the appearances of security, as well as they. The time of our removal out of life is uncertain ; we see those around us indulging themselves in pleasure, and entering upon connexions and pursuits, as if life were sure to last long, and death were at a distance ; and we are inclined to follow their example ; but neither our own security, nor that of other men, will delay the approach of death or of a future judgment. When we flatter ourselves that it is at a distance, it may be most near. That day, whenever it comes, will make a distinction between men, which is now little expected ; it will separate those who are placed in the same situations in life, who exactly resemble each other in every respect, except their moral character. The one shall be taken to happiness, while the other is left for punishment. Let us take care that we be not classed with the latter, and for this purpose, always endeavour to be ready for our judge, whenever he shall come.

SECTION LXI.

Duty of watchfulness enforced, from the opposite treatment of the good and wicked servant.

MATTHEW xxiv. 43—51.

43. BUT know this, that if the good man of the house, “*the master of the family*,” had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up, “*to be broken into*.”

44. Therefore, be ye also ready : for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Our Lord is here illustrating the propriety of watchfulness, in regard to his coming for the destruction of Jerusalem, from the rules of prudence which men prescribe to themselves in common life. As a man, who expects robbers at a particular hour, would take care to be prepared for them at that time ; but if he knew not the hour of their coming, would watch for them all night ; so ought their conduct to be. As they knew not the time of Christ’s coming, and he might appear unexpectedly, they ought to take care to be always ready. By *being ready*, mentioned in the last verse which I have read, and by *watching*, in a preceding, Christ seems to intend the sincere belief and practice of Christianity : for men of this class only would look for his appearing, and perceive the signs of his approach, as laid down by himself, and such only would be entitled to expect the deliverance which was promised to Christians, while the Jews were destroyed. By this language, therefore, he may be considered as exhorting his followers to live in the constant belief and practice of his religion, as their only means of security from approaching danger.

In the following verses our Lord represents the advantages of watchfulness and the danger of negligence, by the treatment a servant meets with from his master upon his return, who has been entrusted with the care of the family during his absence.

45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord, “*master*,” hath made ruler over his household, “*over his servants*,” to give them meat in due season ?

46. Happy is that servant, whom his master, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

What do you suppose would be the conduct of a wise and faith-

ful steward, to whom has been committed the charge of providing for the servants of a large family ? If he be faithful to his master, or prudent in regard to himself, he will be constant in the discharge of his duty at all times, and persevere in it, till his lord returns : for hereby he will not only enjoy the satisfaction arising from a consciousness of having done what was right ; but likewise have the advantage of those great rewards which his master will be disposed to bestow upon him.

47. Verily I say unto you, that he shall, “ *will,*” make him ruler over all his goods.

Before, he entrusted him with the care of his household affairs ; but, for his unremitting fidelity in that office, he will advance him to a much higher, and commit to him the management of all his substance. In like manner, if you believe my gospel now, practise the duties which I have enjoined upon you, and persevere in doing both, till the period of the destruction of Jerusalem, when I shall virtually, although not personally, return, you will enjoy distinguished marks of my favour, being preserved alive, while the unbelieving Jews and insincere Christians will be overwhelmed with calamity.

48. But and if that evil servant, “ *he who is an evil servant,*” shall say in his heart, My master delayeth his coming ;

49. And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken ;

50. The master of that servant shall come, in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

51. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.

The words here translated, “ Cut him asunder,” may mean either cut him in two, as is said to be the practice in the east, to the present day, in regard to criminals ; or, cut him off, i. e. separate him from the other servants, by sending him to prison, or to some other place of punishment. Hypocrites mean hypocritical servants, who appear honest and industrious, under the eye of their master, but are idle and unfaithful, as soon as his back is turned. These are a species of hypocrites. Instead of hypocrites, Luke has unbelievers,* or, as the word might be better rendered, the unfaithful, a name which is very well suited to the character of a man who had so grossly betrayed his trust.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There he shall experience the greatest anguish, such as is usually expressed by the signs here mentioned. The wicked steward, imagining that his master, who had left him at home with the care

* Luke xii. 46.

of his servants, would never return, began to behave in a riotous and tyrannical manner, wasting the provisions committed to his care in gluttony and drunkenness, and beating his fellow-servants ; but his master coming home, when he least expected his return, degrades him from his office, and inflicts upon him the severest punishment, such as is usually inflicted upon those servants who are no longer faithful and sober than while they are under their master's eye.

By this parable, our Lord would represent to his disciples, what they had to expect, if possessing the Christian religion, and performing the duties of it during his presence with them, they should afterwards, during his absence, abandon themselves to the indulgence of their passions, and throw off all restraint, upon a presumption, that he would never return, to inflict those punishments on the Jews which he had threatened. They would be punished like a wicked steward, i. e. be involved in the same calamities with the unbelieving Jews.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM what Christ here says, servants may learn what character they deserve, and what treatment they merit, when they perform only what the apostle calls eye-service : if they are sober, industrious, and attentive to the duty of their station, only while their master is at home, or while they are under his eye ; but as soon as he is gone from home, or they are out of his view, become idle and intemperate ; waste his substance in riotous living, in gluttony and drunkenness ; and quarrel with and abuse their fellow-servants. Such persons are, in the estimation of Christ, wicked servants and hypocrites. They are men of bad principles, and of deceitful manners, who put on the appearance of industry and fidelity, only that they may obtain greater confidence, and have a better opportunity of gratifying their passions : they deserve the severest punishments, as well as the most ignominious appellations. Let those who are placed in this station of life remember, that if they wish to obtain the character of good and faithful servants, to secure their master's approbation, and to rise to a better and more honourable post in his service, they must be as attentive to their duty in the absence of their master, as when he is at home, and be as careful of wasting his substance, as of wasting their own.

2. Let us all remember the representation here given of the situation of Christians. They are servants : however elevated their rank, whatever power they possess among men, they are but the servants of God ; they have their work and their station assigned them in his household ; they are to consult his will, and not to follow their own inclinations. Our Master is in heaven and removed from our view. We may hence imagine that he will not observe in what manner we behave, and never come to inquire into our conduct ; but there is a time fixed for his return, in the counsels of heaven, although concealed from our knowledge ; and

he will as certainly come to judge all mankind, as he once came to judge and punish the Jews. One event was an emblem and pledge of the other.

SECTION LXII.

Parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

MATTHEW xxv. 1—13.

1. THEN shall the kingdom of heaven be likened, “*be like*,” unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

The word, *then*, with which this parable begins, shows that our Lord is still speaking upon the same subject about which he had been discoursing in the last chapter, namely, the period of the destruction of Jerusalem; and his design is to show, by the conduct and treatment of the ten virgins, the situation of good and bad Christians at that time. The parable is founded upon a custom, which prevailed in Judæa and other eastern countries, of the bridegroom, upon the day of marriage, bringing the bride to his house in the evening. Upon this occasion it was usual for the neighbours and friends, particularly young women, to welcome his arrival, by going forth to meet him with lamps in their hands. For this act of civility they were rewarded, if they came in time, with the honour of being admitted to the marriage-feast, which was always held at night.

2. And five of them were wise, “*prudent*,” and five were foolish.

No inference can be drawn hence, in respect to the proportion which sincere Christians bear to those who are so only by profession: some number must be fixed upon, and five of each is as convenient a division as any.

3. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them.

4. But the prudent took oil in their vessels, with their lamps.

The prudent, knowing that the return of the bridegroom was uncertain, took oil, not only in their lamps, but likewise in other vessels, which they carried with them for the purpose; that in case he were longer than they expected, and what they first used were expended, they might be able to supply the deficiency. The foolish neglected this precaution, and carried with them no oil, except what was in their lamps.

5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered, and slept.

By supposing the wise virgins to become drowsy and sleepy, Christ might intend to represent that even sincere Christians, in waiting for his coming, might grow inattentive to their duty in some degree.

6. And at midnight, *later than was usual*, there was a cry made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.

Rather, “are going out :” for it appears from the preceding verse that they had just trimmed them.

9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, “*to the marriage-feast* ;” and the door was shut.

11. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Master, Master, open to us.

12. But he answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.

I do not acknowledge you to be my friends; for, had you really been so, you would have taken care to have come earlier.

13. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

These last words, as well as what the parable begins with, show that it refers to the coming of Christ, for the destruction of Jerusalem, and not to his coming at the general judgment; for he concludes with the same exhortation which he had subjoined to the account which he gave, in the former chapter, of the signs of his coming in that event: his language there was, v. 42, “watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” The intention of the parable is to enforce the necessity of watchfulness, by showing the distinction which will be made in that day, between those by whom it was practised, and those by whom it was neglected. The wise virgins, who carried oil in their vessels as well as in their lamps, who were prepared for the bridegroom when he came, and were admitted with him to the marriage-feast,

are sincere Christians, who by the constant practice of the duties of piety and virtue, would secure his favour, and being always prepared for his coming, would escape the judgments that were coming upon the Jewish nation. The foolish virgins, who took no oil in their vessels, whose lamps were going out at the time when the bridegroom appeared, and were obliged to go to buy more ; who could not, from this delay, attend the bridegroom, and were therefore excluded from the marriage-feast, are those who profess themselves Christians, but want those substantial virtues which are necessary to recommend them to the favour of Christ, and, when he came, would be disowned and rejected by him, and suffered to perish with others.

REFLECTIONS.

LET Christians in all ages make the same preparation for the last coming of Christ, as he here exhorts his disciples to make for his coming to punish the Jews. It was only unremitting obedience to his laws which could save them from the vengeance of the Son of man, in the day of his visitation ; and it is nothing else which can deliver us from his wrath and condemnation, in the last day. It is not sufficient that we make an outward profession of religion ; that we exercise religious affections, and perform religious duties, only for a season, and then neglect them ; that we content ourselves with having put oil once into our lamps, and then resign ourselves to sleep. If the bridegroom come, while we are in this state, we shall be wholly unprepared to receive him : all attempts to get ready at the last moment will be ineffectual ; it will then be too late to repent of our sins, to reform our conduct, and to begin a diligent discharge of the duties of life. The season of preparation is past ; nothing now remains but that we submit to our doom. If we apply for admission into heaven, Christ will say to us, I know you not ; you are not my friends, you possess not the qualities which I require.

If you cannot now bear the thoughts of being thus rejected by Christ, at the last day, resolve to take the only method by which such a calamity can be prevented. Content not yourselves with being called Christians, or with performing your duty at one time ; be diligent and unremitting in doing the work which is assigned you. You will thus be prepared for your master, whenever he may come ; and you will be entitled to the happiness of that servant, who, when his lord came, was found watching.

SECTION LXIII.

Parable of the talents.

MATTHEW xxv. 14—30.

14. FOR the kingdom of heaven, *rather the Son of man*, is as a man travelling into a far country, or, “*going from home*,” who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods, “*his substance* :” *it appears, that he gave them talents.*

The phrase, “kingdom of heaven,” is printed in the Italic character, in our common Bibles, to show that there is nothing answering to it in the original ; and it is badly supplied in this place : for what Christ has been just speaking of in the preceding verse is the Son of man ; and it is undoubtedly him that he has here in view : for he is still discoursing upon the same subject as before, his coming for the destruction of the Jewish state. His design, in the following parable, seems to be to obviate an objection which might be made to what he had said, in the preceding, of the treatment of the wicked Christians. He had represented them as condemned to punishment at his coming, under the character of foolish virgins, who took no oil with them to supply their lamps, and were on that account not prepared to go in with the bridegroom to the marriage-feast. Some of these Christians might plead that they enjoyed but few advantages, and that it was excusable in them if they were unprepared. To show the weakness of this excuse, he delivers a parable, from which it appears that men justly expect a return from their servants, whom they employ in traffic, in proportion to the property which they have committed to them ; and even where they have bestowed little, they look for something. Thus men have different means of doing good to others, and of promoting their own religious improvement, put into their hands ; some more, and others fewer, which they are expected to employ to advantage, in proportion to the degree in which they have been favoured ; those who receive most being expected to do the most ; and those who receive but little, to do something for themselves, or others, in proportion to their ability.

15. And unto one he gave five talents ; to another two, and to another one ; to every man according to his several ability, *according to the opinion he entertained of his prudence and capacity* ; and straightway took his journey.

16. Then he that had received the five talents, went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

18. But he that received one, went, and digged in the earth, and hid his master's money.

This he did for greater security, that it might not by any means be lost.

19. After a long time, the master of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

This is intended to represent Christ's coming for the destruction of the Jewish state, which was a day of reckoning to Christians as well as to the Jews ; those of them who were sincere and diligent being preserved from the calamities of that people ; but those who were only nominal Christians, and negligent of their work, being punished together with them. In this parable it is said, that the master was a long time before he came to reckon with his servants, which corresponds very well with the representations given of this event in the preceding parables, which have already been shown to be applicable to the destruction of Jerusalem : for in one of them, Matt. xxiv. 48, the master is represented as delaying his coming ; and in the other, the bridegroom as tarrying, till all the virgins lumbered and slept.

20. And so he that had received five talents came, and brought other five talents, saying, Master, thou deliveredst unto me five talents ; behold, I have gained besides them five talents more.

21. His master said unto him, Well done thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, "*faithful in a little ;*" I will make thee ruler over many things : "*I will set thee over much.*" Enter thou into the joy of thy master.

That is, either, Be thou a favourite of thy master ; or else, Come to the entertainment made for me upon the joyful occasion of my return.

22. He also that had received two talents came, and said, Master, thou deliveredst unto me two talents ; behold, I have gained two other talents besides them.

23. His master said unto him, Well done thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful in a little ; I will set thee over much. Enter thou into the joy of thy master.

This man is rewarded in the same manner as the former servant.

24. Then he which had received the one talent came, and said, Master, I knew that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed, “*strewed*,” or, “*scattered* ;”

The slothful servant excuses his idleness, by bringing a heavy charge against his master, representing him as an arbitrary and unjust man, who would expect some improvement of the talent he had given him, although he might have the misfortune to lose it ; and therefore, as unreasonable in his expectations, as the man who hopes to reap corn, where none has been sown, or to gather it into sacks, where none has been scattered abroad by winnowing. To avoid the punishment which he pretends he might incur by misfortune, and through no fault of his own, he put the talent which he had received into a place of security, and returns it to his master when he comes back.

25. And I was afraid, and went, and hid thy talent in the earth. Lo, there thou hast that is thine.

Had he lost the talent delivered to him, he supposes his master would have beaten him, for not restoring to him the property which he had given him ; but now, as he returns it safe, he thinks he ought to be exempted from punishment, and even from blame. The master, however, shows, in the answer which he makes, that his motive for hiding the talent was slothfulness, and not merely a fear of losing it ; inasmuch as he might have placed it in hands where it would have afforded profit, yet have been at the same time in perfect security.

26. His master answered, and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant ! Thou knewest, rather, “*didst thou know ?*” that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not scattered ?

27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, “*to the bankers*,” and then, at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury, “*with interest*.”

28. Take therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29. For unto every one that hath, *i. e.* “*hath much*,” shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not, *i. e.* “*hath but little*,” shall be taken even that which he hath.

This is a proverbial saying of our Lord, which we have already met with, Matt. xiii. 12. The meaning of it here is, that the ser-

vant who has many advantages, and improves them well, will receive still more : but he that has few advantages, and neglects to improve them, will be deprived of the little which he possesses.

30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The master of the house coming home after a long absence, an entertainment is made upon the joyful occasion, which, like other entertainments in eastern countries, was celebrated in an evening, in an apartment lighted up with lamps : here it was that the servants were called up to be reckoned with. Those who had been faithful, were invited to enter the joy of their master, i. e. to sit down at table with him : but he that had been unprofitable, is ordered into the darkness that is without, where a sense of the disgrace and punishment which he suffered would make him feel the greatest anguish, such as is expressed by gnashing the teeth.

The servant who received but one talent represents those Christians who enjoyed but few advantages for their own improvement, or the benefit of others. The conduct of the servant in hiding his master's talent, and afterwards restoring it to him without being used, was intended to point out the disposition which some Christians might feel, to neglect the advantages they possess, and to offer excuses for their negligence, when called to account. The reply of the master shows how groundless their pretences are ; that their conduct originated in slothfulness, and that, therefore, they are deservedly punished. There is a considerable resemblance between it and the parable of the householder, who, having planted a vineyard, let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country, Matt. xxi. 33. The design of it is to show, that a return would be expected from all Christians, in proportion to their advantages, and particularly, that something would be expected from those who had received the fewest. The only instance of negligence occurs in the case of the servant who had received one talent ; but we are not to infer hence, that those who receive little are less inclined to improve it than those who receive much : the same instance of negligence was as likely to occur in any of the preceding cases.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE learn from this parable, in general, that a return will be expected from every Christian, in proportion to his advantages ; and that, as his improvement of them has been, so will be his reward. For although the day of reckoning here referred to, seems to have been the virtual, and not the personal, coming of Christ, for the destruction of the Jewish state : yet the principles observed by Christ, in passing sentence upon his disciples at that time, will, no doubt, be observed on the day of final judgment : for the rules of justice are eternal and unchangeable.

In the first place, then, let those who have received many talents remember, that much will be expected from them. Has God furnished you with superior understandings to the rest of mankind, or with more knowledge? He expects that you will take advantage of these benefits, not merely by promoting your own personal improvement in virtue and happiness, but likewise by promoting the good of others, by communicating to the world useful information; teaching them what may correct hurtful prejudices, or tend, in any way, to alleviate the miseries and advance the happiness of human life; particularly, the important principles of religion, which are the best foundation of comfort and of true excellence. Have you a larger portion than your brethren of the good things of this life? Has Providence given you abundance? Larger returns of gratitude and thankfulness are expected from you, than from those who have been less favoured. The gifts of divine bounty are not to be all spent upon yourselves, or your immediate relatives: you are required to expend more than others in doing good; or relieving the wants of the poor; in paying for the instruction of the ignorant. If you have more time than is necessary to provide for the support of yourselves and your families, devote it to the service of the public: employ it in encouraging useful undertakings. Are you furnished with more power and authority than your brethren? Exert yourselves with greater zeal in doing justice to the weak and friendless; in restraining the oppression of the great; in preserving the peace and order of society. In whatever way you are distinguished by the bountiful hand of Providence, remember that this distinction brings with it additional duties.

2. Let not those who have received but little, imagine that nothing will be expected from them. Are you but scantily furnished with the conveniences of life? Do you possess little knowledge, and less power? Say not that it is the business of those who are more highly favoured by Providence than yourselves, to attend to the improvement of their own minds, and study to promote the good of others: something is expected from all, and from each in proportion to his circumstances. There is a sphere, in which even you may be useful, although it may be contracted: there are some who may be benefited by your services, and whose virtue and happiness depend upon the instructions and warnings which you may give them. Perform the duties of your station, however humble it may be, with diligence and fidelity; knowing that an account will be demanded of one talent, as well as of five; and remember, for your encouragement, that if you are faithful in a little, you will be entrusted with more.

Let all remember, whatever their station may be, whether placed in a higher or lower post, whether entrusted with few or with many talents, the doom of the unprofitable servant. They may learn from it, that it is not sufficient excellence for a Christian, that he do no harm; it is sufficient ground to condemn him at the tribunal of Christ if he have done no good; if he have been merely useless and unprofitable. Let every man who wishes to avoid this doom seriously consider, what means of doing good to himself or others Providence has furnished him with; and let him employ them, with unceasing diligence, for this purpose.

SECTION LXIV.

Separation of the righteous and wicked, at the coming of the Son of man.

MATTHEW xxv. 31—46.

31. When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory ;

In the two parables of the ten virgins and of the talents, given in the preceding part of this chapter, Jesus has been exhorting his disciples to watchfulness and diligence, from the consideration that the time of his coming for the destruction of the Jewish state was uncertain, and that when he came, a return would be expected from each of his disciples, according to the advantages which he had enjoyed ; and that from him who had received least, something would be looked for. In this place he makes a transition from the subject of which he had been treating in this and the preceding chapter, his coming for the destruction of Jerusalem, to his appearance for judging the world at the last day ; and his designs seems to have been to encourage his disciples to a faithful discharge of their office, as preachers of the gospel, by representing men as rewarded or punished according as they received or rejected them and their message.

On this occasion, his language and representations have much of the parable in them ; being a feigned narrative, to illustrate a momentous subject, and to adapt it to the conceptions of his disciples. As kings, when they transact important business, are seated upon thrones, and surrounded by ministers ; so Christ, when he comes to judge the world, is represented as seated upon a throne, and attended by angels. This throne is called the throne of his glory, because he will then enter upon the most honourable and glorious part of his office, that of judging the world.

32. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.

In the former verse, Christ compares himself to a king ; here, to a shepherd : for a shepherd classes his flock, according to their nature and value, placing the sheep, the more useful part of them, by themselves, on one side ; and on the other, the goats, the less valuable ; so Christ, at the day of judgment, will separate the good from the wicked. The comparing of good men to sheep, and bad men to goats, is not entirely new : for we find the figure used by the prophet Ezekiel, (xxxiv. 17,) and likewise by Zechariah (x. 3.) The persons assembled before the judge are said to be all nations, which must include Jews and Gentiles, the living and the dead : but it may

be asked, in what place can so great a multitude be assembled, so that they shall be able to see their judge and each other? On account of this difficulty, it has been supposed that the representation here given is not to be understood literally, and that nothing more is intended, than that a separation shall then take place between the righteous and the wicked.

33. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, *in the more honourable place*; but the goats on the left.

34. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

In this language there seems to be an allusion to that addressed by God to the children of Israel, when about to enter Canaan. As that was a kingdom under God, the head and governor of the children of Israel, the inheritance of Christians in a future life, is called by the same name: as the Israelites who observed the law of Moses were pronounced blessed of God, (See Deut. cxviii. 2, &c. ;) so those who observe the terms of the new covenant are said to be blessed of the Father: as the land of Canaan was designed for the children of Israel, from a very early period of time, and promised to their ancestor Abraham; so the new inheritance of Christians is said to have been prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This last circumstance is introduced to show the great value of the inheritance; for the object which men keep in view for a long time, they esteem of great importance. We have next the ground upon which it is bestowed upon them: it was on account of their hospitality and kindness to the first preachers of the gospel, which was a proof that they had embraced it themselves, and an earnest of their intention to obey it.

35. For I was an hungered, "*hungry*," and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in.

The great value of these services, when performed for the preachers of the gospel, can only appear from considering the state of things in these early times. As there were no public inns, for the reception of travellers, they were obliged to depend upon the hospitality of private persons; and if this failed, to lodge in the streets. Hence hospitality to strangers came to be esteemed a virtue of great value, and those who practised it prided themselves on possessing so excellent a quality. Job says, xxxi. 32, "The stranger did not lodge in the streets: but I opened my door to the traveller." Against showing such hospitality to Christians, whose principles were so obnoxious, as to bring danger upon all who appeared in the smallest degree to countenance them, there were strong objections. Few would have courage to do it, except those who were themselves Christians, or inclined to become

so;* yet was it absolutely necessary to the propagation of the gospel: great rewards were therefore promised to those who received and entertained the apostles; and severe threatenings denounced against those who refused to admit them into their house. Thus, when Christ sent out his apostles to preach, he declares, "he that receiveth you receiveth me; and he that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward; and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones," meaning his disciples, "a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple," i. e. as a disciple, "verily I say unto you, He shall in no wise lose his reward;"† and, in another place; "whoso shall receive one such little child," meaning still a disciple, "in my name, receiveth me."‡ The consequences of refusing to entertain the apostles and first preachers of the gospel are thus described; "and whoso shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house, or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment than for that city."||

36. Naked, and ye clothed me :

As the apostles, when sent out to preach, were to carry nothing with them for their journey; neither gold nor silver; neither two coats nor shoes;§ but to depend for these things upon the charitable contributions of those whom they instructed, it would often happen that they wanted decent clothing: the conduct of those who supplied their necessities, in this respect, is here commended.

I was sick, and ye visited me.

Frequent sickness would be the natural consequence of much fatigue and great exposure in travelling continually. On these occasions, the circumstances of the apostles and first preachers were so much the more deplorable, as they were at a distance from their friends, and from the means of relief; without the humane attention of their fellow-christians they must perish.

I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

How often it was the lot of the first Christians to be in prison, I need not mention to those who are acquainted with their history. The apostle Paul, probably referred to this passage, when he prays for Onesiphorus, who oft refreshed him, and was not ashamed of his chain; but when he was in Rome, he sought him very diligently, and found him, "The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day;"¶ i. e. may Christ, in the day of judgment, reward his visits to me in prison, as he has promised.

37. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying,

* Acts xvi. 15. xvii. 7.

† Matt. x. 40, 41, 42.

‡ Matt. xviii. 5.

|| Matt. x. 14, 15.

§ Matt. x. 9, 10.

¶ 2 Tim. i. 16, 17, 18.

Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee ; or thirsty, and gave thee drink ?

38. When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ; or naked, and clothed thee ?

39. Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ?

As it was not obvious how those on the right hand could have rendered the judge such services as he had mentioned, they are represented as asking him, how it could be, or when they were performed. This discourse shows that Christ did not intend to represent, literally, what will happen at the day of judgment ; for it cannot be supposed that such a conversation would be held between the judge and those who appeared before him.

40. And the king shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

By one of the least of his brethren, Christ here means the least of the apostles and first preachers of the gospel. Many instances occur in the gospel of Matthew, in which he calls them little ones, and babes ; because his disciples were like children in regard to knowledge, or the simplicity of their disposition. He now declares that he regarded every act of kindness and hospitality rendered to the meanest of these persons, as performed to himself ; agreeably to the language already quoted, (v. 35) in which he says, " he that receiveth you receiveth me ; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me : and whosoever shall give to drink a cup of cold water only, to one of these little ones, as one of my disciples, shall not lose his reward ;" and, agreeably to the language which he is represented as holding in the evangelist John, " Verily, verily I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me ; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."* We see now the ground on which the services rendered to the apostles were considered by Christ as performed for himself ; and on which he rewarded them with a place in the kingdom of his Father. To receive the apostles, was the same thing as receiving Christ, or the gospel which he brought ; and to receive Christ, was to receive the message of God, who spake by him. It may serve to illustrate this method of reasoning, and to show that it is not unusual in Scripture, to remark, that in the same manner as acts of kindness to the first preachers of the gospel, are here considered as equivalent to the believing and obeying it, and as qualifying the person performing them for eternal life ; so faith in the gospel is likewise considered as equivalent to a compliance with its precepts.

41. Then shall he say also unto them on the left

* John xiii. 20.

hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

The wicked are here called cursed, as the righteous were before denominated blessed, in allusion to the language of God when speaking of the children of Israel, who calls them blessed or cursed, obedient or disobedient. The place to which the wicked are doomed is fire : but this fire must be understood figuratively, i. e. to denote excruciating pain, such as fire usually inflicts. This fire is called everlasting, not because it will continue to burn for ever, but, either because the destruction it will produce will last for ever, or because it is fire that will continue to burn for a very long period. In both these senses is the word *everlasting* used in Scripture, and, therefore, we are at liberty to adopt either of them in any particular passage, as may suit the design and known sentiments of the writer. Which of them is more proper in the present instance, I shall not take upon me to decide.

42. For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink.

43. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in ; naked, and ye clothed me not ; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.

These persons are condemned for not exercising that hospitality and kindness towards the apostles and first Christians, which would have evinced their belief of the Christian religion, and led them to obey its precepts.

44. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee ?

45. Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

By refusing to receive and entertain the first preachers of the gospel, they showed that they rejected Christ, or the revelation which he brought, upon the knowledge and belief of which their hopes of future happiness depended.

46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

This passage has been supposed to prove that wicked men will be for ever miserable and everlastingly tormented : for all admit hence that the future life of the righteous will be strictly eternal ; yet the same epithet is applied in the original, although not in our translation, to the punishment of the wicked : one must, therefore, be as durable as the other, i. e. everlasting ; and those who are everlastingly punished must live for ever, to endure that punishment. But, to say nothing here of the utter inconsistency between

the supposition of a creature's enduring eternal misery, and all our ideas of the divine mercy and goodness, or of the disproportion between the offence and the punishment ; upon that system, I shall only observe, that a punishment may be said to be in the strictest sense of the word eternal, although the being upon whom it is inflicted be no longer alive, if that punishment be permanent and never removed : it may likewise, in a popular and scriptural sense, be said to be eternal, if it last for a very long and indefinite period.

The persons who are here described as condemned to this punishment, are those who, by refusing to receive the apostles and first preachers of Christianity, rejected the gospel of Christ ; and those rewarded with life eternal, are such as showed, by their kindness and attention to them, that they respected their character and embraced their doctrine. Hence the disciples of Christ would derive great encouragement to proceed with diligence and vigour in their work of instructing mankind ; seeing that attention to them was to be so highly rewarded, and a neglect of them so severely punished.

REFLECTIONS.

THE important subject which we have now been considering, should teach us ever to keep in view the grand distinction which will one day be made between the righteous and the wicked, between those who received the gospel when offered to them, and those who reject it, or who, having received it, disregard its precepts. They are to be separated from each other, and destined to a very different condition : to the one will be given eternal life, an existence which will never perish nor decay, but in which the powers of the mind will be continually strengthening and enlarging, in which the sources of pleasure will always be increasing, so as to exceed the highest degree of intelligence and enjoyment of which we can now conceive ; an existence to be spent with God and Christ, and in the society of good men assembled from every quarter of the globe. How great the goodness of God in bestowing such a life ! How happy the condition of those who are destined to possess it ! What is there in the fairest of human prospects when compared to this ? What are all the honours, possessions, and pleasures of this life ? How cheerfully should we sacrifice them to obtain what is of such superior value, if the sacrifice should be required !

But while we contemplate this happiness with pleasure, let us not forget the melancholy contrast which is presented to our view at the same time : to be excluded from the society of the good ; to endure much pain and great distress, if not at length to be entirely destroyed ; to be blotted out of the creation of God ; and to lie under a sentence of destruction from which we shall never recover. Is there no disgrace in such treatment ? Is there no loss in such punishment ? Those who can make light of it, and

voluntarily expose themselves to its horrors for the momentary pleasures of sin, must be guilty of the highest presumption and madness.

Let us, therefore, carefully attend to the duties by which the one may be avoided, and the other obtained. If some of them be painful and difficult, let us remember the prize for which we are contending, and the dreadful alternative if we should be unsuccessful: the first contains all that is valuable; the other, the loss of every thing, or misery, the extent of which we cannot calculate or conceive.

SECTION LXV.

The chief priests and scribes engage Judas Iscariot to deliver up his Master.

MATTHEW xxvi. 1—16.

1. AND it came to pass when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples,

2. Ye know that after two days, "*in two days*," is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed, "*will be delivered up*," to be crucified.

Christ had foretold his own death and crucifixion many times before: he now mentions the particular time at which it would take place, at the approaching feast of the passover. This feast was instituted in commemoration of God's passing over the houses of the children of Israel, when he destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians: it was to be kept wherever the peculiar presence of God resided, Deut. xvi. 5, 7, and therefore at this time at Jerusalem. At this place all the males from every part of the kingdom were required to attend, in order to eat the paschal lamb: this circumstance rendered that season peculiarly proper for the death of Christ, as great numbers would hereby be witnesses of the event. The day on which Christ suffered was Friday, and that on which he addressed this language to his disciples, is generally supposed to have been the preceding Wednesday, when there would be two days, according to the Jewish method of reckoning, i. e. part of two days, till the passover. Our Lord's design in foretelling the time of his death, seems to have been to prepare his disciples for the trying season.

3. Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high-priest, who was called Caiaphas;

This assembly was the grand council,* called the Sanhedrim, to whom it belonged to determine what should be done with false

* John xi. 47.

prophets. It consisted of priests and laymen, and particularly of such priests as were the heads of their different courses,* and who were called chief priests. The high-priest, at whose house they assembled, appears to have been at the head of this senate, and was probably the president.

4. And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him, “*put him to death.*”

5. But they said, Not on the feast day, “*in the festival,*” which, including the days of unleavened bread, lasted eight days, lest there be an uproar among the people.

They knew that he had many friends among the people, and more among those who resided in the country than among the inhabitants of Jerusalem: they thought it not prudent, therefore, to attempt to put him to death while the city was full of strangers, lest an attempt might be made to rescue him, and their scheme be defeated. But Judas, one of his disciples, offering to deliver him up into their hands, they altered their purpose.

6. Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,

Simon was still called a leper, although he had been cured of that complaint, and probably by Jesus himself. To his house Jesus retired, after he had delivered the discourses recorded in the last chapter, and returned not to Jerusalem again, until the evening on which he ate the passover with his disciples.

7. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, “*of perfumed ointment very costly,*” and poured it, *i. e. part of it*, (see John xii. 3,) on his head, as he sat at meat.

Matthew and Mark have not informed us of the name of the woman, who paid this mark of respect to Jesus; but John tells us, in the passage referred to, that it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha.

8. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?

9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

The evangelist John is more particular in relating one part of the transaction: for he says, “Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should deliver him up, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence,” (*about ten pounds of our money,*) “and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had

* Luke i. 5, 8, 9.

the bag, and bare what was put therein." What is here attributed to Judas only, is ascribed in Matthew and Mark to others of the disciples, if not to all. These two accounts are easily reconciled by supposing that Matthew spoke in the plural number, as is very common, when he intended only one person, or that the other disciples might feel some uneasiness at what was done, which Judas was the most forward in expressing, and, therefore, he only is noticed.

10. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman, for she hath wrought a good work upon me? "*She hath done a good deed for me.*"

11. For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always.

That is, you blame this woman without reason, for that testimony of respect which she has shown to me; her action deserves rather to be commended than censured. Although I admit that the superfluities of life are not to be all expended upon ourselves, while the poor are in want, yet many opportunities will still occur to you of showing kindness to the necessitous, if you have ability; but to me, who am to be crucified in a very short time, you will have no opportunity again of showing respect: you ought not, therefore, to censure as an improper waste an action, which, although expensive, is a suitable testimony of regard, when only once performed.

12. For in that she has poured this perfumed ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.

Besides, you may consider what has been done to me as done for my burial, and in that view you cannot condemn it. You approve of much larger sums being expended in embalming the dead bodies of eminent personages: you ought not, therefore, to be displeased if this woman has performed that office for my body while living, which you would applaud, if performed when it is dead, but for which no opportunity may occur.

13. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this women hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

I myself approve of this token of respect which she has rendered me; and I assure you that the time is coming, when it will be so far from being regarded as extravagant and undeserved, that it will be commended as having no small merit, and mentioned to her honour wherever my gospel is preached.

Judas, offended at the reproof which had now been given him, although delivered in the mildest language, and disappointed at not receiving the price of the perfumed ointment, resolves to recover, by selling his Master, what he had lost.

14. Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, *whom he found assembled together with the elders*;

15. And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

This was three pounds, ten shillings, and eight-pence halfpenny of our money. That Judas could be induced, for so trifling a sum of money, to deliver his Master into the hands of his enemies, may appear surprising, especially when we know that he believed him to be innocent: but it will lessen this surprise if we recollect that this disciple followed Jesus, from the first, from worldly motives, from a desire of obtaining some of those pleasures, emoluments, and honours, which, he imagined, were to be enjoyed under the Messiah, as a great temporal prince. Being disappointed, however, in these expectations, by observing that Jesus rejected worldly honours when offered to him, and forbade his disciples to look for them, he was resolved to take the first opportunity of forsaking him. What urged him to it at this time, was the disappointment which he had just met with. His mind was probably reconciled to this act of treachery, not merely by the reward which he received for it, although that was more considerable than appears to us, for it was sufficient to buy a field in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, where land must sell high, but likewise by the hope that his Master, by working a miracle, or by some other means, would escape out of the hands of his adversaries. Hence, when he perceived that Jesus was condemned to die, he repented of what he had done; showing, hereby, that he never expected so fatal an issue.

16. And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him up.

He had promised the chief priests to deliver him into their hands, in the absence of the multitude; and an opportunity of doing this was not long wanting.

REFLECTIONS.

IN this short portion of the evangelical history, we have exhibited to our view very opposite characters: we have before us the extremes of virtue and vice in the same picture. We see a friend of Jesus, impressed with his virtues, testifying her respect for him publicly and in the most expensive manner. We see another friend, not less indebted for acts of kindness, selling him to his enemies for money. We behold the Jewish council, consisting of expounders of the law, of the ministers of religion, and of the most respectable men in the nation in regard to property, consulting about the time and means of putting to death an innocent and

excellent character ; while Jesus, the object of their malice, speaks of his own crucifixion, which he knew was to take place in two days, with as much tranquillity as if it were the most ordinary event.

How different were the motives by which these persons were actuated ! How much does human nature appear to be ennobled in the one instance and degraded in the other ! It is difficult to say which is most deserving of our detestation, the temper of the chief priests and scribes, who were plotting against the life of Jesus ; their envy of the reputation which he had acquired by his good works and excellent character ; or the conduct of Judas, who pretends a great concern for the interests of the poor, only that he may have an opportunity of robbing them ; who takes advantage of the intimacy of friendship to betray his friend.

Let us, my brethren, learn to guard against the first workings of envy in the breast. It deceives us at first by appearing to be only a desire of excelling others, which is commendable, but it leads to pride, hatred, malice ; nor, as we see from the example of these persons, is there any deed, however atrocious, which men are not ready to perpetrate in order to gratify this odious passion. Be careful to suppress the first symptoms of it in the heart ; instead of grieving at the reputation and prosperity of others, rejoice in them, and do every thing in your power to promote both.

In the conduct of Judas we see to what the love of money leads : it not only makes men deaf to the calls of gratitude and to the obligations of friendship, but it hardens the heart against the distresses of the poor, and induces men to withhold from them that small portion, which the charity of the beneficent allows for their subsistence. The observation of the apostle is here verified, that those who would be rich by unjust means fall into temptation and a snare, and into many hurtful and foolish lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition : for the love of money is the root of all evil ; which, while some have coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

If the testimony of respect shown to Jesus by Mary was commendable, as appears from his calling it a good work, from his not suffering her to be interrupted in it, and declaring that it should be celebrated wherever his gospel was preached, he is entitled to still greater respect from *us*. This action was an expression of her high esteem and ardent affection : she loved him because she was well acquainted with his excellent virtues ; and because she had received his instructions ; and because her brother Lazarus had been raised from the dead. But we have still stronger motives for our affection : we have not only heard his invaluable doctrine, and seen his excellent character displayed before our eyes, in common with Mary and the first disciples, but have beheld him sacrificing his life, in the most painful and ignominious circumstances, for our benefit. This last favour more than doubles the weight of our obligations, and renders us totally inexcusable if we are backward to testify our respect.

While others then treat Jesus with scorn and derision, as a weak enthusiast or crucified malefactor, let us show how high he stands in our esteem : let us daily read the history of his life, and joyful-

ly embrace every opportunity of commemorating his death and sufferings: let us particularly give him that testimony of our regard which he himself has required from us, and which he values more than any personal respect—"If ye love me, keep my commandments."

SECTION LXVI.

Jesus eats the Passover with his disciples, and institutes the Lord's Supper.

MATTHEW xxvi. 17—35.

17. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, "*the first day of unleavened bread*," the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

As the feast of the passover was succeeded by seven days in which the Jews ate unleavened bread, the passover itself is sometimes denominated, from that circumstance, the feast of unleavened bread; and that feast is said to begin on the day in which the paschal lamb was killed; although it did not begin till next day, Mark xiv. 1.; Luke xxii. 1, 7. The paschal lamb is here called the passover, although that name is usually given to the day on which it was to be eaten: this question was addressed to Jesus some time, probably, on Thursday morning.

18. And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master, "*the Teacher*," saith, My time is at hand, *the time of my death, or, more probably, the time of observing the feast*, I will keep the passover at thy house, with my disciples.

This person Jesus was acquainted with, although his disciples were not. To account for his freedom in thus bespeaking the use of another person's house, it is said, upon the authority of Jewish writers, that at the time of the passover, and of the feast of unleavened bread, when Jerusalem was so full of strangers, no person was required to pay for lodgings; but those who came out of the country were allowed the free use of the houses of the inhabitants.*

19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them, and they made ready the passover.

They carried a lamb to the temple, to be killed by the priests, or performed this office themselves, and afterwards roasted it whole for supper.

* Lightfoot, v. II. p. 255, English.

20. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve, *to eat the passover.*

21. And, as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall deliver me up.

This he said by way of reproach and complaint, as what was peculiarly unbecoming one who had received from him so many marks of kindness.

22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began, every one of them, to say unto him, Lord, "*Master,*" is it I?

This they said more with a view to clear themselves from suspicion, than from an apprehension that they could be guilty of such a crime.

23. And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall deliver me up.

Judas sat so near to Jesus that they used the same dish at the same time. Describing the traitor by this circumstance, he points him out with sufficient plainness to the disciples, as the person to whom he alluded.

24. The Son of man goeth, as it is written of him, *i. e. goeth to suffering and death, agreeably to the predictions of Scripture*; but wo unto that man by whom the Son of man is delivered up! It had been good, "*it were better,*" for that man if he had not been born.

Jesus acknowledges that what he was about to suffer, had been foretold by the Divine Being, by means of his prophets, and that it was therefore what he and his disciples ought to acquiesce in: yet he observes that this circumstance would by no means preserve from punishment the person who should be the principal instrument in bringing it upon him. The expression, "*It had been good for him if he had never been born,*" is a proverbial phrase, and not to be understood literally: for it is not consistent with our ideas of the Divine goodness to make the existence of any being a curse to him, or to cause him to suffer more misery, upon the whole, than he enjoys happiness. Rather than do this, God would not have created him at all. But as it is usual to say of men who are to endure some grievous punishment or dreadful calamity, that it would have been better for them never to have been born, Christ foreseeing what Judas would bring upon himself, by delivering up his Master into the hands of his enemies, applies this language to him. Job, (iii. 3,) when in trouble, wished that he had never been born, although his life had, upon the whole, been very happy.

25. Then Judas, which delivered him up, answered and said, Master, Is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

The last words, *thou hast said*, are a Hebrew phrase, which, in such connexions, signifies the same thing as yes, or, it is. Had Judas remained entirely silent, while each of the other disciples appeared so eager to clear himself, a strong suspicion of guilt must immediately have fallen upon him. This he hoped to avoid by boldly asking the same question as the rest, to which he expected no answer would have been returned : but Christ disappointed him by declaring that he was the man.

26. And, as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, "*blessed God*," and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, *i. e. a representation of my body*.

The design of the ordinance which Christ was now instituting, might be easily collected from that in which they had been just engaged. As the passover was instituted to commemorate the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage, so the bread and wine were intended to commemorate the benefits communicated to mankind by the death of Christ. Nothing could be more natural than to understand these words of Christ, *this is my body*, figuratively ; since it was customary for the master of the family at this feast to say, *this is the Lord's passover* ; though he thereby meant no more than, *This is the memorial of God's passing over our houses*. The blessing was not applied to the bread but to God, and consisted either in giving him thanks, or in praising his perfections : the breaking of the bread seems only to have been for distribution, just as he had used to break the bread at ordinary meals.

27. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it.

28. For this is my blood of the New Testament,

This is a representation of my blood of the new covenant. The law of Moses was the old covenant ; when this was read to the people of Israel, and they consented to it, Moses took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you, concerning all these words, *Exod. xxiv. 8.* ; intimating, by this action, that the covenant between God and the children of Israel was now ratified ; the mutual assent of both parties being accompanied with the sprinkling of blood, which was used when solemn bargains or agreements were made. To this ceremony our Lord here alludes, when he calls his blood the blood of the covenant, and intimates hereby, that the new covenant, or new institution, which he had introduced, was completed and finished by his death.

Which is shed for many,

The Mosaic covenant was limited to the descendants of Abraham, and therefore the blood by which it was ratified, was shed for a few ; for a comparatively small portion of mankind : but the benefits of Christ's death were to reach to Gentiles as well as Jews, even to all mankind : therefore his blood is said to be shed for many.

For the remission of sins.

For the recovery, i. e. of mankind from the condition of Gentiles, to the condition of the privileged people of God, or from the condition of sinners to the condition of saints.

29. But, “ *and,*” I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you, in my Father's kingdom.

This is the last time I shall drink wine with you, until I drink it a second time with you, after my resurrection, when the kingdom of God, my Father, will commence in the world.

30. And when they had sung an hymn, “ *psalm,*” they went out into the mount of Olives.

The word here rendered sung, may signify repeated or recited a hymn : for we are told that it was customary at the Jewish passover, to recite six psalms of praise and thanksgiving, one half before the passover meal, and the other half afterwards : it is to this practice that these words may refer.

31. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me, *made to fall off from me*, this night ; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

You who are my disciples, being deprived of me your leader and protector, shall be scattered abroad, through fear of my enemies ; for, as the prophet speaks, the usual consequence of smiting the shepherd is, that the sheep are scattered abroad, Zeck. xiii. 7. To strengthen their faith in him, and to prevent an utter defection, he proceeds to tell them that he should rise from the dead, and appear to them in Galilee after that event.

32. But, after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

33. Peter answered, and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

34. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee : likewise, also, said all the disciples.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE have occasion to observe again, how odious was the character of Judas ! He was the familiar companion of Jesus, permitted to be near his person, honoured with the freest conversation, entrusted with a confidential post : he sits at the same table, and dips his hand in the same dish : yet this is the man who, notwithstanding all these ties, lifts up his heel against him, who delivers him into the hands of his enemies, and receives money as the price of his treachery. Thus he betrayed and injured a most excellent character and his own best friend : he does this, too, after repeated warnings to beware of what he was doing. After every allowance that can be made, on account of his not expecting that the issue would be so fatal to his Master, it must be acknowledged that such conduct discovers a very high degree of baseness and depravity ; for though he did not foresee all the consequences which ensued, he could not but know that he exposed him to great danger.

2. We see that although Providence employs wicked instruments to accomplish its purposes, this does not lessen the guilt of the agent. When the most important benefits are to be conferred, when mankind are to be saved, when the world is to be christianized, Judas Iscariot, a mercenary traitor, is to be the instrument : thus God brings good out of evil, and overrules the passions and vices of mankind for correcting and reforming the human race ! But let no one imagine that because good may eventually arise from his misconduct, it is, therefore, justified or excused. Where men are influenced by bad motives, their actions must be criminal ; and they will be severely punished : from no one action did so much good arise as from the treachery of Judas : yet he is threatened, notwithstanding, with the most dreadful calamities.

3. We see how plain and simple is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, as it was instituted by Christ : it is nothing more than eating bread and drinking wine, as memorials of the death of Christ, in the same manner as eating the passover, was a memorial of the deliverance of the children of Israel, when the first-born of the Egyptians were destroyed. Yet the ignorance of Christians has converted this simple rite into a stupendous miracle, in which, by a few words speaking, the bread and wine are suddenly transubstantiated into the real body and blood of Christ, and continue to be his real body and blood, notwithstanding our senses inform us to the contrary. Other Christians, forgetting the religious purposes for which the ordinance was instituted, have ordered it to be employed as a test of political principles, and a qualification for civil offices : while many of those who condemn this application,

of the Lord's Supper, fall into an opposite, and equally glaring, mistake, by considering it as an ordinance of peculiar solemnity, which none are to engage in but those who have attained a high degree of Christian excellence, nor they, without much careful preparation. None of these errors receives any countenance from the plain language of the institution.

4. The generous resolution of Peter and of his fellow apostles, is worthy of all Christians. "Although all men be offended because of thee, yet will not I be offended; and although I should die, yet will I not deny thee." Such language well becomes us: for there is no friend of whom we have less occasion to be ashamed; none to whom we have stronger motives of attachment. But, whenever we form such resolutions, let us remember what happened in the melancholy case of Peter and his associates, and beg of God to strengthen our purposes, and to preserve us from so disgraceful a fall.

SECTION LXVII.

The agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

MATTHEW xxvi. 36—46.

36. THEN cometh Jesus with them, unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

Jesus, knowing that his crucifixion was approaching, and feeling the insupportable burthen which the apprehension of suffering produced, wishes to relieve his mind by prayer, and to retire from his disciples for this purpose. Gethsemane was some part of the mount of Olives, whither, we are told, verse 30th, they retired. The name signifies *oil-press*.

37. And he took with him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, *i. e. from that part of Gethsemane where he left the rest of the apostles*, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy; "*exceedingly distressed*;"

38. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; *i. e. I am almost dead with sorrow*, tarry ye here, and watch with me.

The agony of distress which Christ felt at the approach of his sufferings, has appeared to many a great difficulty in the evangelical history; and they have had recourse to extraordinary suppositions to account for it; some supposing that the devil was now let loose upon him, and permitted to fill his mind with these horrors:

others, that he was penetrated with a sense of the divine wrath, inflicted upon him by the immediate hand of God, which he suffered as the substitute of mankind ; others, again, that the divine nature, which usually resided in Christ, was withdrawn, and his human nature left to itself. But the agitation of Christ may be explained in an easier manner : “ those divines,” says Archbishop Newcome, “ entertain the most just and rational notions, who do not think that our Lord’s broken and dejected spirit was a trial supernaturally induced, but assign natural causes which shook his inmost frame.”* The whole of what our Lord felt, upon this occasion, may be accounted for upon the principles of human nature, without supposing any miracle ; if we recollect how much men usually suffer from the approach of violent pain, and how greatly his sufferings must have been aggravated by his long previous knowledge of all the dreadful circumstances of his death. The prospect of common evils, such as bodily pain, is very distressing, and frequently much harder to bear than the actual pain itself : but those which Christ had in view, had in them every thing that was dreadful ; he knew that he was to be publicly insulted, nailed alive to a cross, exposed naked upon it to public view, for several hours, in company with malefactors who justly deserved so painful and ignominious a punishment. Not to have been distressed at such a prospect, would have argued either gross stupidity, or something superior to human nature. This deep distress is to be attributed to his having had communicated to him, for twelve months before, a distinct knowledge of his death, accompanied with all these dreadful circumstances. Where violent bodily pain is to be endured, the longer men know it before, the more do they suffer from the apprehension : for every time they think upon the subject, their feelings must rise to a higher pitch of acuteness, just as repeating a blow upon a part already sore from a wound, increases the pain. In this manner were the feelings of Christ increased, to that agony of distress which we see him suffering in the garden. This account is rendered probable by observing that he frequently foretold his own crucifixion, and that the prospect of it made a strong impression upon his mind at an early period.†

While we admit that the weakness of human nature appeared in these distressing apprehensions about approaching evils, we should also remember, that they were accompanied with perfect resignation to the Divine will, that they lasted but for a short time, probably not more than half an hour, and were succeeded by complete and uninterrupted tranquillity, during the whole of the dreadful scenes which followed. These circumstances render our Lord’s conduct more instructive and encouraging, than if he had discovered no degree of perturbation ; because it is better suited to the common feelings of mankind, when placed in similar circumstances.

Whatever there might be in our Master’s conduct on this occasion which some might condemn, he, it seems, was not ashamed or

* Newcome’s *Observations on our Lord’s Conduct*, &c. 2d. ed. p. 426.

† See Luke xii. 50. John xii. 27.

afraid to have it known : for he took with him three of his disciples, that they might be witnesses of his behaviour ; and, although he removed from them to a small distance, in order that he might apply himself without interruption to the subject which engaged his thoughts, he was still within hearing.

39. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

The cup which Jesus here prays might be removed from him, was not his present discomposure and dismay, but a violent death, which is called “ a cup,” because it was his portion : from this it was natural for him to wish to be delivered ; and it was equally natural for a devout mind to express that wish by prayer to God. By *possible*, must here be meant not a natural possibility, (for in this sense all things are possible with God,) but one consistent with the schemes of the Divine government. He does not pray to be delivered from death, whatever the consequences might be, but only conditionally, provided the same wise and good ends could be answered without it : if not, he is willing to submit to a violent death, with all its horrors. Here then we see the greatest submission to the will of God, under the greatest distress ; which is the best temper of mind that the circumstances of the agent admitted of.

It may appear surprising that, after Jesus had foretold his own death and crucifixion, in consequence of a revelation of it, which he had received from heaven, he should think it possible, that he might be delivered from it. Many predictions and commands, however, mentioned in the Old Testament, which were delivered in the most absolute terms, appeared in the issue to be conditional. Thus Abraham received a command from God to offer up his son Isaac, which he was afterwards excused from executing : Nineveh, of which it was foretold by the prophet Jonah, that in forty days it should be destroyed, was saved, upon the repentance of the inhabitants ; and Hezekiah, who was told, by the prophet Isaiah, to set his house in order, for that he should die, upon his earnest prayer had his life spared, and was permitted to live fifteen years longer. These facts might lead Christ to entertain some distant hope of being exempted from suffering, although it had been foretold in so unconditional a manner. That this hope was very faint, appears from the violent agitation of his mind.

40. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What ! Could ye not watch with me, “ *keep awake with me,*” one hour ? “ *one moment ?*”

Jesus addressed himself to Peter in particular, because of his late professions. When these things happened, it was probably a very late hour of the night, which was the reason of our Lord's

exhortation to them in the first instance, to watch or keep awake, and of their inability to comply with it.

41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Follow my example in praying to be delivered from trials: for although your judgment be well informed, and would direct you to behave aright in them, yet your passions and infirmities will not permit you to do so. We see here that Jesus, amidst all his fears about himself, retains a concern for his disciples, and preserves his temper towards them, notwithstanding they had behaved so ill as to fall asleep, while he was in the utmost distress.

42. He went away, "*went from them,*" again, the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

Notwithstanding the horror with which I view my sufferings, I am willing to submit to them, if thou hast determined that they are necessary, and the purposes of thy government cannot be accomplished in any other way. Such a temper, considering what Jesus felt at this time, discovers the highest degree of faith in God, and exalts his conduct far above that of other men, who would have been willing to purchase deliverance from death upon any terms, in the like circumstances.

43. And he came, and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy.

Their spirits having been exhausted with sorrow, and it being also a very late hour, they were extremely drowsy: they remained awake, however, long enough to hear what Christ prayed, or at least, so much of his language as is here recorded.

44. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Christ's motive for repeating the same sentiment so many times was, to express more fully his submission to the Divine will, in the same manner as David expressed his high respect for Jonathan, by bowing his face to the ground three times, 1 Sam. xx. 41.

45. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest.

This sentence would be better translated as a question; *Do ye still sleep, and take your rest?* upbraiding them with still indulging themselves in sleep, notwithstanding his repeated admonitions.*

Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

* Luke xxii. 46.

As there was a great multitude that accompanied Judas, it is probable that Jesus had by this time heard the noise of their approach. By calling those to whom he was to be delivered up, *sinner*s, Jesus does not mean to express his opinion of their moral character, but merely, that they were Gentiles and not Jews ; for with Jews a common and familiar name for Gentiles was that of *sinner*s. In Matt. xx. 19, Christ foretels that he shall be delivered up to the Gentiles ; to whom he must likewise refer, when he says that he is delivered up into the hands of *sinner*s.

46. Rise, let us be going : behold he is at hand that doth deliver me up.

Christ was so far from attempting to escape, that he proposes to his disciples that they should rise, and go forth to meet those who were sent to apprehend him.

REFLECTIONS.

1. FROM the conduct of Christ, upon this occasion, we learn where we ought to seek relief, when overwhelmed with distress ; not in flying to business or pleasure, to company or amusements, in order to divert our thoughts from the causes of our sorrows or fears ; much less in drowning the senses in wine, but in having recourse to retirement and prayer. Here it was, that our Master, when afflicted, sought relief ; and here he found repose. From the time that he unburthened his mind in prayer, he felt himself perfectly tranquil and composed : although, but a moment before, he had experienced the greatest agony of mind any human being ever endured in like circumstances. Let this recommend prayer to our esteem : it is a sovereign remedy for all our evils : nothing can be better calculated to give us fortitude for meeting danger, or for calming the troubled spirits, than those just views of the perfections and providence of God, which we acquire by this exercise. Let us then, my brethren, be instant in prayer, and not think it sufficient to observe stated seasons for this purpose ; but whenever the heart is oppressed with anxiety, or the mind agitated with fear or sorrow, let us, after the example of Christ, prostrate ourselves before our Father who is in heaven.

2. We see what sentiment it is proper for us to express when afflicted ; nothing can be more proper or becoming than that which comes from the mouth of Christ, Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt : thy will be done. If we should lose any of our valuable relatives and friends, upon whom our comfort and happiness in life appeared to depend ; if our affairs should not prosper in the world, and we should be reduced from affluence and ease, to poverty and distress ; if Providence should take away our health, and afflict us with pain and sickness, and bring us to the borders of the grave ; if we should be reduced to straits and difficulties, on account of our religious profession, suffering the loss of reputation, of property and liberty, or even of life ; in all these distresses, let us learn to

say to God, with the same sincerity and readiness as our Master, Thy will be done. It is impossible to escape trouble ; for it is the necessary condition of humanity ; nor is it possible, entirely, to suppress the feelings of human nature at the prospect : But if we can act thus under them, we shall show the strength of our faith and the force of Christian principles.

3. How different are the feelings and conduct of men before their trials, and at the time they actually arrive ! The disciples of Jesus were bold and confident when danger was at a distance : they loved their Master unto death : there was nothing to which they would not submit rather than disgrace him, or renounce their principles : they were prepared to brave every danger ; yet a few moments afterwards they are negligent and careless. Instead of sympathizing with their Master when in the greatest distress ; instead of being upon their knees to request assistance and strength for the trials which, they were repeatedly informed, were approaching ; we find them asleep, insensible to their danger, and to the feelings of pity.

It is not surprising, that men who were so bold and confident before danger, should betray the utmost consternation when it arrived ; thus fulfilling every thing which their Master had foretold. But, behold Jesus, who entered upon the conflict with strong cries and tears, yet with earnest and frequent prayer, behaving with the utmost tranquillity and composure in the day of trial, and never once acting unworthily of his character. Thus we learn not to be too confident in our good purposes and resolutions, and see that some degree of fear is a better preparation for danger than confidence ; just as those have been observed to prove the best soldiers, who tremble when they first enter the battle.

SECTION LXVIII.

Jesus is apprehended, and led before the high-priest.

MATTHEW xxvi. 47—58.

47. AND while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude, with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

The Jewish Sanhedrim, here described as *the chief priests and elders of the people*, having passed a vote for apprehending Jesus, and fearing resistance, sent a band of Roman soldiers to seize him.

48. Now he that delivered him up, gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he : hold him fast.

49. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master, and kissed him.

This was the usual form of salutation with friends, among the Jews : (See Luke vii. 45,) where Jesus says to Simon, I entered into thy house — thou gavest me no kiss.

As it was now night, and Jesus was unknown to the soldiers, it was necessary to point him out to them by some sign : this was fixed upon by the traitor, as the most likely to conceal his intentions from the other disciples, and to prevent them from making any resistance.

50. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come ?

By these words, Jesus intimates to Judas the knowledge he had of his treacherous designs, and mildly reproaches him with the inconsistency between his intentions and professions. Such language from his Master, the moment when he was doing him the greatest possible injury, must sink deeply into the heart of Judas, and contributed much, probably, to that desperate resolution which he afterwards took.

Then came they and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

51. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus, stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high-priest's, and smote off his ear.

The person who committed this act of violence was the apostle Peter, as we learn from the evangelist John, who mentions his name.* As Peter might be living at the time when Matthew and the other evangelists wrote their histories, and as it was a criminal action in him thus to oppose legal authority, it has been supposed, with much probability, that they were induced to conceal his name, through fear of bringing him into danger : but John, writing long after, and when Peter was dead, had no such motive of concealment. Peter was a man of warm passions, and wished to show by his conduct, the sincerity of the promises which he had lately made, (verse 33.) Besides, he could not yet persuade himself, that Jesus would submit to be apprehended by his enemies : he thought it his duty to fight for his Master, and had no doubt that he should overcome his foes. Some have expressed their surprise that such an instrument as a sword should be found in the hand of an apostle : but it appears from Luke xxii. 38, that the disciples carried with them two ; as they travelled through every part of the country, a few such weapons might be necessary to defend them from robbers, with whom it was infested.

52. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy

* John xviii. 10.

sword into its place : for all they that take the sword shall, “*will*,” perish by the sword.

This is a proverbial expression, which was common among the Jews : its meaning is, that those generally perish by war, who are forward to deal in it. Peter, although single, was ready to attack the whole band of soldiers. By this language, Christ intended to warn him of the extreme imprudence and rashness of the attempt ; intimating that it would end in his own destruction. He next reminds him that it was opposing the will of Providence, which did not want means of delivering him, if it were so inclined.

53. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ?

Jesus here refers to the miraculous powers which Peter had seen him exercise, and asks him whether, after being an eye-witness of these powers, after having seen him raise the dead, and calm the winds, and waves of the sea, he can doubt whether God would give him any assistance that might be necessary for his defence ; not merely twelve men such as they were, or twelve legions of soldiers, each consisting of six thousand men, but twelve legions of angels ; a force which nothing would be able to resist. Such a force he could have easily obtained, if he had thought proper to ask for it : but this he did not choose to do, because he apprehended, from the Scriptures, that it was the design of Providence that he should suffer. Daniel vii. 10. 2 Kings, vi. 20.

54. But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be, *i. e. which say that thus it must be ?*

That is, If my apprehension, and the other things which are to follow, do not take place, how will the divine intentions, as intimated in the Scriptures, which say I must suffer, be fulfilled ? The Scriptures, to which Christ is supposed to refer, are those which speak of his sufferings and death, particularly Isaiah liii. 8, 9, 10, where these events are plainly foretold. By telling Peter that he submitted to be taken, in order to comply with the will of heaven, he points out to him a proper reason for his own acquiescence.

55. In the same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves, for to take me ? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.

This language seems to be addressed to the Jews who accompanied the band of soldiers, and is a gentle reproach to them for treating as a malefactor one who so little deserved that character, and an expression of surprise at the sudden change which had taken place in their conduct towards him. It was not long since they had listened with pleasure to the discourses which he deliver-

ed to them in the temple, and were so far from regarding him as a criminal, who ought to be apprehended, that they considered themselves as greatly indebted to him. Christ felt a momentary regret and indignation at being treated so unworthily : but he immediately reconciled his mind to it by the consideration which he next suggests.

56. But all this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

That is, That the intentions of Providence, as communicated to the prophets, might be accomplished. He had mentioned this to his disciples ; he now mentions it to the Jews.

Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

Seeing Jesus, contrary to their expectation, quietly submit to be apprehended, making no resistance himself, and forbidding others to make any, they became alarmed for their own safety, and took to flight.

57. And they that had laid hold on Jesus, led him away to Caiaphas, the high-priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

Jesus had been apprehended by a decree or vote of the Sanhedrim, and is now brought to appear before them.

58. But Peter followed him afar off, unto the high-priest's palace, *or hall*, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

Peter although alarmed, as well as the rest of the disciples, was not entirely overwhelmed with fear : he followed him at a distance ; restrained from forsaking him by a sense of shame, after having made the solemn professions of attachment which were mentioned a little before.

REFLECTIONS.

WE have now followed Christ through another important scene of his last sufferings, his apprehension by the soldiers ; and we see as much reason to praise and admire his conduct, as to censure and condemn the conduct of others.

1. The conduct of Judas was in the highest degree base : he approaches Jesus with expressions of respect and joy, *hail Master*, whilst he was meditating the greatest injury : he employs the symbol of friendship, to perform the part of an enemy : this was a blacker deed than that of Joab towards Amasa, who said, " Art thou in health, my brother ?" — taking hold of his beard to salute him with one hand, and stabbing him to the heart with the other.

Nothing is so apt to ruffle the mind as the unkindness of a friend, or ungrateful usage from those upon whom we have confer-

red benefits ; and the farther men are from this baseness of character themselves, the more sensibly are they affected by it in others. This trial Christ was now exposed to, in the severest form : he saw one of his own disciples, whom he had endeavoured to instruct in the principles of true religion, and to whom he had shown every possible mark of kindness and friendship, approaching him with expressions of love and respect in his mouth, only to conceal his design of betraying him. What could be more cruel and provoking than such behaviour ? Yet not one angry word or abusive expression falls from his lips : Friend, wherefore art thou come, is the language in which he addresses him. Base and vile, however, as was this act of treachery in Judas, he is not the only one of Christ's professed disciples who betrays his Master with a kiss : this is a crime committed by many others, who profess to detest the hypocrisy of Judas : under the appearance of respect and professions of friendship, they do him the greatest injury. Thus there are some who declare they respect his character as a man, but reject the credentials which he has produced, of his divine mission ; as if it were possible that a person should be a good character who practises fraud and imposture. Such professions cannot be sincere : they are only employed to conceal their design of undermining his authority, and of sinking both him and his religion into contempt. Many are the additions which have been made to the simple institutions of the gospel, under the pretext of doing honour to Christ and his religion, but in reality, to gratify the pride, the ambition, and the sensual lusts of men. By such corruptions Christianity has received a deep wound ; and the Saviour of mankind been degraded. Under pretence of a holy zeal for the religion of Jesus, Christians have persecuted infidels : they have treated them with every kind of injustice and cruelty : they have hereby taught them to regard Christians as plunderers and usurpers, and perpetuated that enmity to Christianity, which might have been easily removed by calm reasoning and mild treatment. These have all betrayed their Master, as Judas did, with a kiss : while professedly fulfilling *his* wishes, they have been gratifying their *own* : under pretence of zeal for his service, and of doing him honour, they have rendered his person and his religion odious.

2. The reproof which Peter met with, when about to defend his Master with the sword, should teach us what conduct we ought to observe under persecution ; we should avoid danger, and flee from our enemies, if it be possible, but, if this cannot be done by peaceable means, we ought not to attempt to rescue ourselves or others by violence. It is the design of Providence that Christians should suffer : it answers a very useful purpose under the divine government, by awakening men's attention to the truth, and inducing them to embrace it : whereas resistance awakens enmity, and turns men's attention to another subject. That Christians should suffer, has likewise been foretold in the Scriptures : to refuse to submit to it, therefore, is to refuse to submit to the will of God, as intimated to us by the experience of mankind, and by his Holy Word, and consequently, is highly criminal.

That those who take the sword, perish by the sword, had been so frequently observed in our Lord's time, that it was become a proverb. The experience of two thousand years more in the history of the world, has only served to confirm the observation: individuals who delight in blood and massacre, fall a sacrifice to it themselves: nations which are fond of engaging in war, without regard to the principles of justice and equity, accomplish their own ruin: yet, alas! notwithstanding the experience of so many ages, mankind seem as little disposed to learn wisdom from the event, as if they had never received instruction.

SECTION LXIX.

Jesus condemned of blasphemy by the council.

MATTHEW xxvi. 59—63.

59. Now the chief priests and elders, and all the council, sought false witness, "*false testimony*," against Jesus to put him to death;

60. But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none.

That is, none that was sufficient for putting him to death: they sought for evidence to convict him of a capital crime; but in this they did not succeed, although they were ready to admit what was false. The charges produced, either did not amount to a capital offence, or were so evidently groundless, as not to afford a plausible pretext for passing sentence of death.

At the last came two false witnesses,

61. And said, This fellow, "*this man*," said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

These witnesses are justly called false, because they did not report exactly the words of Christ, and, likewise, because they put a false construction upon them.—When the Jews asked him for a sign, or proof of his authority as a divine teacher, he referred them to his resurrection from the dead, saying, John ii. 19, "Destroy this temple," not the temple, "and in three days I will raise it up," meaning the temple of his body, in which the divine perfections were manifested in the same manner as they were on the mercy-seat of that celebrated building. The Jews perverted these words into a declaration of an intention to destroy the temple at Jerusalem, and to rebuild it in three days, which was a criminal project, that discovered a mind disposed to sedition and tumult.

62. And the high priest arose, and said unto him,

Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?

63. But Jesus held his peace.

The charge brought against Jesus, if well founded, could not amount to a heinous crime, sufficient to ground a sentence of death upon it; for he could not mean ill to the temple, who talked of destroying and building it again: such language, if it had been really used, ought to have been regarded as an empty boast, more deserving of contempt than of censure. The high-priest, therefore, wished to make Jesus himself speak, hoping that, in the course of his defence, something might be said which would afford better ground of accusation, than any thing which had hitherto been produced: but Christ having been silent at first, because the charges were too frivolous to merit refutation, had an additional motive for silence, when he perceived the design of the high-priest.

And the high-priest answered, and said unto him, I adjure thee, by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

This was the Jewish form of putting a man upon his oath: whoever was thus adjured, and refused to speak, was condemned, by the law of Moses, to severe punishment. (Lev. v. 1.) Whatever a person delivered after being thus adjured, had all the force and solemnity of an oath. The high-priest, having failed in his endeavours to draw Jesus into a snare, by calling upon him to speak his own defence, now exercises his authority, as president of the council, to oblige him to answer, upon oath, to the question whether he were the Christ, the son of God: where you see that Christ and Son of God are words of the same signification in the estimation of the high-priest. If he replied that he was, he hoped to take occasion thence to convict him of a capital crime: if he were still silent, it would be a virtual renunciation of his claims; in either case, an important purpose would be answered.

64. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said, *i. e. I am.**

Jesus had declined, hitherto, saying that he was the Messiah, because, as the idea of a temporal prince was universally connected with that character by the Jews, the public avowal of it might have excited tumult and sedition among the people, and jealousy among the civil rulers. He wished also that the people should collect the evidence of his being the Messiah from his miracles, rather than from his own declarations: but no evil could arise to any one but himself, from his acknowledging himself the Messiah, in his present circumstances; he, therefore, plainly declares it, although he knew the use that would be made of his declaration.

Nevertheless, "*moreover,*" I say unto you, Hereaf-

* Mark xiv. 62. Matt. xxvi. 25.

ter shall ye see, "*ye shall soon see,*" the Son of man* sitting on the right hand of power, *i. e. of the divine power*, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

What is here called the right hand of power, in the parallel place in Luke is, the right hand of the power of God; Luke xxii. 69. The right hand, is the highest post of honour in the courts of princes: to sit, therefore, at the right hand of the divine power, is to be honoured in the highest manner by the power of God. So that when Christ speaks of himself in this passage, as speedily to be seen by the Jews in the clouds of heaven, he means no more, than that the inhabitants of Jerusalem would be as severely punished, on account of the sufferings which they inflicted upon him, as if they were to see him coming in the clouds of heaven for that purpose. There is a considerable resemblance between these words of Christ and his language upon another occasion, Matt. xxiv. 30, when, foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, he says, Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

65. Then the high-priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy.

Blasphemy properly signifies injurious words, more especially such as are injurious to God: in this light did the high-priest regard the declaration of Christ, that he was the Messiah; and not without reason, if that declaration were ill founded: for to assume the character of a divine messenger, and a right to speak his name, are pretensions which, if false, would be highly dishonourable to God. The malice and inconsistency of the high-priest appear, in his first adjuring Jesus to declare whether he were the Messiah, as if he wished for information, and then making the avowal of it the ground of a charge of blasphemy. The high-priest was forbidden by the law of Moses to rend his clothes: Lev. xxi. 10. But that prohibition was probably limited to funeral cases: in other instances, he might be allowed to indulge himself in this usual expression of sorrow among eastern nations.

What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

66. What think ye? They answered, and said, He is guilty of death, "*guilty of a crime deserving of death.*"†

The Jews had no power, at this time, of executing a sentence of death: but they still maintained the forms of judicial proceedings; and when a criminal was condemned, abandoned him, as appears by what follows, to all kind of ill usage, after the manner of the most barbarous nations.

* That is, Him whom ye do not seem willing to acknowledge under any other and higher character. Amner. p. 64, (Note.)

† He is guilty of blasphemy, for which, by our law, he ought to die. Lev. xxiv. 16.

67. Then did they, *i. e. they who held and guarded him*, spit in his face, and buffeted him, *struck him with their fists upon the head*, and others smote him with the palms of their hands.

68. Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee ?

That is, Tell us, without seeing, (for Christ was at this time blindfolded,) *who is he that smote thee ?* Prophets were enabled not only to foretel future events, as their name properly signifies, but likewise to know other things beyond the reach of human sagacity.* By asking Christ, therefore, these questions, while his face was covered, they ridiculed his pretensions to the character of a prophet.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE have here a melancholy example of the depravity of human nature, in the conduct of Christ's judges. Instead of waiting to receive the testimony of others ; instead of carefully sifting their evidence, in order to discover whether they spoke the truth, or were actuated by malice ; they invite men to accuse him : they accept of their testimony without examination : they suggest false evidence by their manner of proposing questions to the witnesses ; and when these artifices were not sufficient for answering their malicious purpose, they oblige the prisoner himself to speak, in order that they may obtain a pretext for condemning him, from his own lips. How unworthy is such conduct of a Jewish council, sitting in judgment upon the life of a prisoner ! How unworthy of the Jewish high-priest, a chief magistrate and minister of religion ! After beholding every principle of humanity and justice violated, in the treatment of the prisoner, without concern, in vain is it that he pretends to be shocked with blasphemy, and rends his garments from affected concern for the honour of God : it is not a zeal for religion that he feels ; but it is the unhal-lowed warmth of envy and malice, which kindles his passions. Such hypocritical advocates for the honour of God are surely more odious than the professed libertine, who openly acknowledges his contempt of him.

2. How honourable is this trial to the character of Jesus ! Had he always exercised his miraculous powers, and been surrounded by a numerous train of friends and followers, it might have been said, that there were many things exceptionable in his conduct, but that no one dared to impeach it, through fear of experiencing his own resentment or that of the multitude. But behold him now in the hands of his enemies, entirely deserted by his friends, and suspending the exercise of his divine gifts : he is a friendless prisoner at the bar of

* 2 Kings, vi. 12.

the Jewish Sanhedrim, without any one to plead his cause or defend his character. Those who should have shielded him from false testimony, call for, and encourage it ; but what do these encouragements and advantages, on the part of his enemies, produce ? Nothing but a charge, by a gross perversion of his words, of an intention to destroy the temple. How fair must the character of Jesus have been, which remained unspersed in such circumstances !

3. The discretion, composure, and meekness of Jesus are worthy of admiration. Amidst false accusations and manifest injustice, he observed a strict silence. Persons of less self-command would have been violently agitated in such circumstances : they would have uttered violent exclamations against the malice of their accusers, and the partiality of their judges. But the meek and lowly Jesus bears all with perfect composure : he sees the whole scene of iniquity which is passing before him, without being transported into one intemperate expression : he maintained an expressive silence, which conveyed his sentiments more forcibly than if he had spoken. While he thus supported the dignity of his own character, he fulfilled the language of prophecy, which said of him, as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. When he does speak, it is to avail himself of an opportunity of solemnly asserting his claims to the character of the Messiah, and to avoid the imputation to which his silence might be liable : this was an opportunity of doing good which he could not decline, although he knew that it would afford his enemies occasion to accuse him of a capital crime.

Let the disciples of Christ, after the example of their Master, be ready to profess the truth, and to give a reason of the hope that is in them on every proper occasion ; whatever the consequences may be with regard to themselves. But let them also learn from him, that the best method of treating some accusations is not to notice them : they are so evidently false and malicious, that they may safely leave them to time and the cool consideration of mankind, to refute.

Lastly, how affecting is it to behold our Lord and Master in such humiliating circumstances ; to see him in the hands of a wanton mob of enemies ; to see him exposed to the degrading insult of being spit upon, struck upon the head with the fist, slapped on the face with the palm of the hand. And is it possible, that he whose behaviour was so mild and unoffending, that he who delivered such excellent instructions, which charmed the hearts even of his enemies, that he who performed so many beneficent miracles, and was a friend to all the distressed ; is it possible that he who was transfigured upon the mount, and honoured so often with a voice from heaven, declaring him the favourite of God, should be exposed to such brutal usage, and receive such unworthy returns ? How mysterious are the ways of Providence ! How unsuitable are its plans to our wishes and expectations !

Let no one be surprised, after this, to see the most excellent characters treated with scorn and insult : let no one complain of ungrateful returns from those whom he has endeavoured to serve.

SECTION LXX.

The denial and repentance of Peter.

MATTHEW xxvi. 69—75.

69. Now Peter sat without, in the palace, “*court*,” and a damsel, “*one of the maid-servants*,” came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.

What is here translated, a palace, was properly a court before the house, or a place surrounded with a wall, but open to the sky ; hither Peter had followed his Master, from affection to him, and curiosity to see the issue. Christ is called Jesus of Galilee, because Nazareth, the city where he was probably born, was in that part of the country, and to distinguish him from other persons of the name of Jesus, which was a common appellation among the Jews.

70. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

When the maid-servant charged Peter with being with Jesus, she intended to accuse him of being his follower, or disciple, 2 Kings vi. 16. This Peter now denies, and moreover declares that he did not know what she referred to by using such language.

71. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow, *this man*, was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

Peter, finding that he was known to the persons whom he met in the court of the high-priest, retreated to the porch; thinking that he should remain there unobserved. But he is again discovered, and charged with being a follower of Jesus.

72. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

His former denial not having cleared him from suspicion, he now endeavours to give solemnity to it, by appealing to God for the truth of what he said, and by imprecating his vengeance upon himself, if it were false.

73. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth, “*betrayeth*,” thee.

Peter, by speaking in the dialect, or with the accent of the inhabitants of Galilee, which was different from that of Jerusalem, discovered himself to be of that country ; and as the people were generally followers or admirers of Jesus, in consequence of his spending so much of his time among them, there was a good presumption, that this Galilean was one likewise.

74. Then began he to curse, *i. e. to wish curses to himself*, and to swear, saying, I know not the man.

Peter's fears must have been very great, when they could induce him to utter so palpable a falsehood. Not know Jesus, so celebrated for his miracles, who travelled into every part of the country, and was known by person to almost every inhabitant of Judæa!

And immediately the cock crew.

This is generally supposed to refer to the crowing of an animal: but there is an objection to that supposition, of considerable weight, which it is not easy to remove. When Jesus said to Peter, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice, or, as the evangelist Mark has given us the account, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice, he must have intended to deliver a prophecy, the fulfilment of which it would be possible to ascertain, and which, when fulfilled, would tend, together with other miracles, to convince this apostle, and other persons, of his divine mission. But although it might be true of a particular fowl, that he did not crow that morning until Peter had denied his Master three times, yet it could not be known that no other animal in Jerusalem of this species had not crowed before, that morning; and, therefore, it would be impossible for Peter to determine whether his Master's prophecy, respecting himself, had been accomplished or not. Some, indeed, have attempted to remove this difficulty, by saying, that our Lord did not mean to speak of the actual crowing of any cock, when he delivered this prophecy, but that only before such a time in the morning, which was called cock-crowing, Peter should deny him so many times. It is evident, however, that all the evangelists who have recorded this story, understood Jesus to speak of some sound called the crowing of a cock, which was to be heard after Peter's third denial of him.

But every difficulty in respect to this subject will be removed, by considering how the Romans, who were at this time masters of Judæa, divided the night, and the methods they took to announce its different periods. It appears, from Latin authors, that the night was divided by them into four periods, which they called watches, each consisting of three hours: the first began at six in the evening; the second at nine: the third, at midnight; and the fourth at three in the morning.—These are called watches, because wherever Roman soldiers were stationed, a guard of them was appointed to watch for so many hours in the night, and afterwards was relieved by another body of men. We have traces of this division of the night in the New Testament.* Whenever the Roman guard was relieved, it was announced by the blowing of a trumpet; and as the third trumpet was sounded at three o'clock in the morning, the time about which the cock usually begins to crow in the morning, that sound of the trumpet was called the crowing of the cock. Now as Jerusalem was a Roman station, where a body of soldiers was always placed, the same practice of relieving the guard and sounding the trumpet would be observed there as in

* Mark xiii. 35.

other places, and Peter being now at the house of Caiaphas, the high-priest, which was probably near the castle or fortress, might easily hear the sound of this trumpet. When Jesus, therefore, said to Peter, Verily I say unto thee, this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice, he meant to foretel that he should be guilty of the crime of denying him three times, before the third trumpet sounded, which was called the cock crowing; and when the evangelist Matthew observes, after Peter's third denial, that immediately the cock crew, he meant to say that the third trumpet, called by that name, immediately sounded. The evangelist Mark, who was the companion of the apostle Peter, and whose account, therefore, is supposed to be the most accurate, relates this matter rather differently from the rest: for, according to him, Christ's prophecy was, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice; and he afterwards tells us, that the cock crowed twice before Christ had been three times denied. But his account is by no means inconsistent with what has now been said, respecting the crowing of the cock being the sound of a trumpet: for the trumpet, or horn, which was sounded at the close of the night, when the guard was removed, was called the second cock.*

75. And Peter remembered the words of Jesus, who said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly.

REFLECTIONS.

IN the conduct of Peter we see a shameful want of fortitude, and a striking contrast between his present behaviour and late professions. He who, a few hours before, declared to his Master, in the most solemn manner, Although all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended; and though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee: he who was so full of courage as to lift up his sword in defence of his Master, and to attempt to oppose by force a whole band of soldiers, is now so terrified, that he trembles at the voice of a woman, who only charges him with being a follower of Jesus. He is ashamed of having been the companion of Christ; of an acquaintance with one whom he ought to have been proud to acknowledge as his Master and friend: he denies a clear and unquestionable fact, well known to all that knew Peter, not once only, which sudden surprise might have rendered excusable, but repeatedly; not with simple asseverations, but with the most solemn appeals to God for the truth of his assertions, and with dreadful imprecations of divine vengeance upon his head, if he were guilty of falsehood; and all this he does, after being warned of his danger. What accumulated guilt! How unlike is this conduct to the character of the man whose name imported that he was a rock, and that

* Anglo-Scotus, i. e. the late Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer, in the Theol. Rep. vol. VI. p. 105.

upon the foundation of his testimony and resolution, the church of Christ was to be built! What a disgraceful fall do we behold from the greatest confidence, to the greatest terror, from the strongest professions of attachment, to the most abject denial! Justice requires, however, that while we thus represent the heinousness of his crime, we should notice the symptoms of goodness which accompanied it: if he was guilty of a great crime in denying his Master, yet he persisted in it only for a short time, during a few hours, at farthest. As soon as his Master's words are brought to his remembrance, by the sound of the trumpet, he repents of what he has done, and shows the sincerity and force of his sorrow by tears, which flowed so violently that he was obliged to seek retirement, to give full vent to his passion.—But the best proof of his repentance appeared in the conduct of his life, by his steady professions of attachment to his Master, of whom he was now ashamed, in the midst of the greatest opposition and danger.

From the disgraceful fall of this apostle, let us learn not to rely too much upon good purposes and resolutions. Such confidence may expose us to temptations which we are not able to withstand, and may lead us to make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience: it is better to distrust our strength than to be too confident of it. Had Peter been properly sensible of his own weakness, he would not have attempted to follow Jesus, but have retired with the other apostles, and thus, by keeping himself out of the way of danger, have escaped much guilt. We see what danger attends those who allow themselves any deviation from the truth: one falsehood generally leads to many more.—Peter having once denied his Master, was impelled to do it a second and a third time, and to add the guilt of perjury to falsehood. We see also how necessary fortitude is to a Christian: it is the shield of virtue: he who wants it will be the prey of every adversary.

SECTION LXXI.

Jesus is led before Pilate. Repentance and death of Judas.

MATTHEW xxvii. 1—10.

1. WHEN the morning was come, “*early in the morning,*” all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus, to put him to death.

This was a continuation of the same council which we read of in the last chapter; they had been sitting during the night, and had condemned Jesus as worthy of death. Early in the morning, they held a private conference among themselves, after Jesus had been removed, how they might procure his condemnation from the Roman governor, in whom alone the power of life and death was now vested. They wished to have him crucified; and they were con-

sidering how they should persuade the governor to inflict that punishment.

2. And when they had bound him, they led him away to Pontius Pilate the governor.

The sacred writer here interrupts his narrative respecting Jesus, to inform us of the conduct of the disciple that betrayed him.

3. Then Judas, which had delivered him up, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

This passage plainly shows that Judas did not imagine, when he delivered up Jesus, that he would be put to death : he hoped that he would perform some extraordinary miracle, in order to deliver himself from his enemies, or, by some other means, escape out of their hands. This hope, joined to the love of money, reconciled his mind to the wicked deed : but when he saw the event turn out so differently from what he expected, and likely to terminate in his Master's death, he was sorely grieved for what he had done, and, as the best reparation he could offer for the injury, he came to make a public declaration of his innocence ; with some faint hope, probably, that he should hereby prevent his enemies from proceeding further.

4. Saying, I have sinned, in that I have delivered up the innocent blood.

This testimony to the innocence of Jesus is the most illustrious and honourable that could be given, when we consider from whom it comes, and the time when it was delivered. Judas had lived in the same intimacy with Jesus as the other disciples : he was perfectly well acquainted with all his words, actions, and designs ; if there had been any thing criminal in these, he would have been glad to produce it, on the present occasion, to justify his conduct in betraying him, and to quiet his own mind, in regard to what he had done : but so far is he from being able to do this, that he is constrained, by remorse of conscience, to declare, that he had never seen any thing in the behaviour of his Master which could be imputed to him as a crime, or justify either his own conduct, in delivering him up into their hands, or theirs in condemning him to death.

And they said, What is that to us ? see thou to that.

If thou hast done wrong in delivering up a man whom thou thinkest to be innocent, that is thy concern, and not ours ; trouble us not with the business : we are satisfied that he deserves the sentence that we have passed upon him ; for we know him to be a blasphemer.

5. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Judas held the crime which he had committed, in so much abhorrence, that he could not bear to carry with him the money which he had received as the wages of iniquity, and which every moment reminded him of his guilt, but offered it to the chief priests and elders ; and when they refused to receive it, he went and threw it down in the temple, that it might be put into the treasury, whence he retired to put an end to that existence which a consciousness of guilt had rendered insufferably painful.

6. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

The law of Moses prohibited the children of Israel from bringing into the temple the price of prostitution : Deut. xxiii. 18. Hence these chief priests and elders inferred that the price of blood, or the reward paid for delivering up a man to be condemned to death, would be equally offensive to the Divine Being. Here we may observe, how the men who rejoiced in the treachery, express their abhorrence of the traitor, and how careful those are to observe a ceremonial law, who totally disregard the fundamental principles of mercy, justice, and truth !

7. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in.

This field was provided for the burial of strangers, i. e. not Gentiles but Israelites, who came to Jerusalem, from foreign countries, for religious purposes, but, being taken ill, died there. Some provision of this kind there was probably already ; but, on account of the great number of strangers that died at Jerusalem, it was become necessary to make some addition to their burying ground.

8. Wherefore that field was called the field of blood unto this day.

Bishop Pearce thinks this verse an interpolation, produced by inserting in this place what is said in Acts i. 19, of the field in which Judas falling headlong, his bowels gushed out ; “ for this place was from that time called the field of blood ;” in confirmation of which he observes, that the next verse has no connexion with this, but with the 6th and 7th only.

9. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value,

10. And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

As these words are found in Zech. xi. 12, 13, and in no part of the prophecies of Jeremiah, it has created some difficulty to account for the introduction of this prophet's name here. The excellent critic just referred to, supposes, that Matthew wrote origi-

nally *the prophet*, without mentioning any name, which is a common method of quotation with him, but that some very early transcriber inserted, by mistake, the name of Jeremiah, instead of that of Zechariah, which has continued in all our copies from that time.

REFLECTIONS.

IN this portion of the evangelical history, as well as in that which we last considered, we have a memorable instance of the weakness of human nature, affording us also a very instructive lesson. In the conduct of Judas, as in that of Peter, we have an example of a great crime committed by a disciple of Jesus, but where the circumstances were very different. The one sold his Master for money ; the other only denied him, and that when he apprehended his own life to be in danger : the one was led into temptation by attachment to his Master, and by following him in his last moments ; the other, offered himself voluntarily for sale. What will ye give me, said he, and I will deliver him into your hands. These circumstances discover very different degrees of guilt ; and as the nature of the crimes was different, so also was the issue. Both Peter and Judas indeed repented, but not after the same manner. Peter melts into tears at the recollection of what he had done : his sorrow is distressing : but it is mixed with the hope of pardon, and therefore may be borne. But Judas had committed so black a crime as to exclude every ray of hope : the door of mercy appears to be shut against him ; and he can find no ease to himself but by putting an end to his being. Something commendable, however, and good there is even in Judas : he discovers evident tokens of deep remorse for what he had done : conscience, therefore, was not entirely stifled in his breast : he bears testimony to the innocence of Jesus, even before those who had condemned him as worthy of death, and thus did every thing he was now able to do, to repair the injury.

Let those who cherish an inordinate love of money remember the sad example of Judas Iscariot, and beware lest, by following his steps, they bring themselves to a like miserable end.

SECTION LXXII.

Jesus is arraigned before the Roman governor.

MATTHEW xxvii. 11—25.

11. And Jesus stood before the governor ; and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the king of

the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest, *i. e. I am.*

The sacred writer, having finished the digression in which he had made his reader acquainted with the conduct and fate of Judas, now returns to the history which he resumes where he had left off, viz. at the arraignment of Jesus before the Roman governor. The chief priests and elders had delivered him up to Pilate, with the general charge, that he pretended to be the king of the Jews : this charge, if it could be established, would amount to the crime of high treason, a capital offence, and was much more likely to engage the attention of the Roman governor, than an accusation of blasphemy, upon which they had found him guilty in their own court. Pilate, therefore, asks Jesus, Whether he was, what he had heard, king of the Jews ? To this, he answered, by acknowledging that he was, (see Matt. xxvi. 25,) but declaring, at the same time, as we learn from the other evangelists, that his kingdom was not of a temporal nature, and not likely, therefore, to interfere with any civil authority ; consisting in nothing more than a propagation of the truth. This is that good confession which Paul tells Timothy, (1 Tim. vi. 13,) Christ witnessed before Pontius Pilate.

12. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

They now opened more fully the charge which they had before delivered in general terms.

13. Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee ?

14. And he answered him to never a word, inso-much that the governor marvelled greatly.

Jesus, having said enough to satisfy the governor, with respect to his real character, if he were an equitable judge, by the answer which he made to his first question, and shown the Roman government to be in no danger from his pretensions, declines pleading any more, in answer to the accusations of his enemies : for that would have looked like wrangling and disputing, which was inconsistent with the dignity of his character, and unbecoming his present circumstances. This conduct was so very unlike that of other prisoners, whom he had observed to be generally eager to defend themselves, that Pilate was much surprised.

15. Now at that feast the governor was wont, “*used,*” to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would, “*which ever they desired.*”

The Roman government was so odious to the Jews, that the governors were obliged to have recourse to these extraordinary methods to gain the favour of the populace.

16. And they had then a notable prisoner called Barabbas.*

17. Therefore, when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you ; Barabbas, or Jesus, which is called Christ ?

This man, as we learn from the other evangelists, was a robber, and was now in prison for being at the head of an insurrection, in which murder was committed. Pilate mentioned to them so infamous a character rather than any other prisoner, in order to save Jesus ; imagining that they would not hesitate to prefer Jesus, who was, in every respect, the reverse of Barabbas.

18. For he knew that for envy, "*from hatred,*" they had delivered him.

This he inferred from what he knew of his past life, from the modesty of his present behaviour, and more especially, from their not being able to prove any crime against him. It is evident from the history of the persecutions of Jesus, that the Jews were actuated by a more violent passion than envy, even by malice. This was produced, no doubt, in a great degree, by envy of his reputation, arising from his character, instructions, and extraordinary miracles, as well as from the severity with which he reproved the Scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and wickedness. This was one reason why Pilate wished to deliver Jesus ; in the next verse we have another.

19. When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man : for I have suffered many things this day, in a dream, because of him.

When the Roman governor passed sentence upon a criminal, he was placed upon a high seat in the open air, in a place appropriated to this purpose, and paved with marble. (John xix. 13.) Pilate had just seated himself here, when he received this message from his wife. By her account she had this dream in the day ; but this language is easily understood, when we recollect that, according to the method of reckoning time in Judæa, the day commenced at six o'clock in the evening, and did not end till six o'clock the succeeding evening. The night, therefore, was included in that period of time which Pilate's wife calls this day ; and it was then that she had her dream. What it was she appeared to herself to see or hear, we are not informed ; but it was something which impressed upon her mind a persuasion of the excellence of Christ's character, and which she probably considered as of a supernatural and miraculous nature, and therefore sent to acquaint her husband with it, that he might not treat the person of Jesus with a severity which

* Some ancient MSS. have, both in this and the following verse, the word *Jesus* before Barabbas.

he did not deserve. However, as the powers possessed by Jesus were of a very extraordinary nature, and must have been known to her by common fame, we may easily imagine that he might become the subject of a dream, without any divine interposition.

20. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus, *i. e. desire that he might be destroyed.*

As Judas apprehended Jesus in the night, during the absence of the people, and as it was still very early in the morning, some have supposed that the multitude here spoken of, were those who were employed in apprehending him, consisting of the servants and dependents of the high priests, and of such other persons as they had hired for the purpose. If this were the case, we can easily account for their asking so readily for the death of Jesus : whereas the common people were generally favourable to Jesus, and would not, we might expect, so soon change their opinion. However, if it were otherwise, we may account for this sudden change by the extreme veneration which the Jewish people felt for their chief priests and elders, whom they saw eager to have Jesus put to death.

21. The governor answered, and said unto them, “ *said unto them again,*” for they had yet made no reply to his former question, Whether of the twain, “ *of the two,*” will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

22. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ ?

If the two persons had the common name of Jesus, (see the note on verse 16,) it would be proper to denominate one of them by adding, *he who is called Christ.* But if they had different names, the word Jesus would of itself be a sufficient mark of distinction : it is not probable that the term Christ or Messiah, was so commonly applied to Jesus as to be considered as a part of his name, although there were some that distinguished him by that appellation.

They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

They not only express their wish that he might be put to death, but prescribe the manner in which it should be done,—by the punishment of the cross. This punishment was most ignominious and painful : for it was inflicted only upon slaves and the vilest malefactors, for the crimes of treason, sedition, robbery, and others of a like heinous nature ; it was extremely painful, because nails were driven through the hands and the feet, in those parts where the nerves are the most sensible of pain.

23. And the governor said, Why ! What evil hath he done, “ *what crime then hath he committed?*”

After the explanation which Jesus had given of his pretensions

to kingly power, Pilate was persuaded that the charge of treason was entirely without foundation, and therefore he saw no reason for putting him to death, much less for inflicting upon him so dreadful a punishment as crucifixion.

But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

24. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person ; see ye to it.

To wash the hands, was among the Jews, a symbol of innocence ; see Deut. xxi. 6, 7. In allusion to it the Psalmist says, Psalm xxvi. 6, “ I will wash my hands in innocency.” It was also practised by the heathens. By this ceremony Pilate gave the most solemn and public testimony to the innocence of Jesus, and declared, at the same time, that he would have no concern in his death. He was probably afraid that if he had opposed the wishes of the people any longer, they might have seized Jesus by force, and put him to death with their own hands ; as they did afterwards in the case of Stephen. This does not justify his conduct : for he ought to have risked the worst consequences rather than put an innocent person to death : but his guilt in consenting to his death is less than that of the Jews in calling for it.

25. Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children !

We are willing to make ourselves responsible for all the guilt which may attend putting him to death. Thinking that Jesus, who was now apprehended, and appeared no longer able to defend himself, could not enjoy the favour of God, or be the Messiah, they uttered this imprecation upon themselves without fear.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe the wisdom of Providence in permitting Jesus to appear before different tribunals, for hereby the prophecies relating to him, which foretold that he should be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, were fulfilled ; and his innocence was rendered more certain and conspicuous. Had there been any thing criminal in his conduct, it could not fail to be discovered by one or the other of his different judges : but if they all fail in finding evidence of guilt, it affords the strongest presumption that he is innocent. Jesus was to be the Saviour of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews : it was proper, therefore, for their satisfaction that he should be called before one of their own body, and that there should appear in him nothing worthy of death.

To be arraigned before two tribunals, and to have the second confirming the sentence of the first, may appear, at first view, to be a reflection upon the character of the Saviour, and to afford a strong presumption of his guilt. But, if we examine the matter, we shall find that it has quite an opposite effect : for what are the charges brought against him, and upon which he is convicted ? By the Jewish Sanhedrim he is accused of blasphemy, and upon that accusation, condemned to die ! But when his enemies bring him before Pilate, they are so fully convinced that this charge was frivolous, or ill-supported, that they take fresh ground, and hereby afford a plain proof of the injustice of their former sentence. They now accuse him of attempting to make himself king, in opposition to Cæsar ; the very thing which they wished him to do, and in which he would have experienced their most zealous support. But there was nothing for which his conduct afforded less colour than this calumny : for when the people would have taken him by force, and made him a king, he withdrew himself from them : he never had denied the authority of Cæsar, nor encouraged tumult or seditions. So weak and ill founded does the charge appear, that Pilate himself, who had every reason to be jealous of any attempt against the government, and would have been glad of a colourable pretext for putting him to death, is obliged to acquit him, and takes no small pains to obtain his liberty. When they call out for his execution, he reasons and expostulates with them upon the injustice of their conduct. When his expostulations are of no avail, he endeavours to throw the blame of his condemnation of Christ entirely upon the people : I am innocent of the blood of this just person ; see ye to it.

2. How astonishing is it that the people should prefer Barabbas to Christ, if indeed it was their choice ! They denied the holy one and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted to them ! Wicked and ungrateful people ! Where was your regard to religion, your respect for justice, your love of innocence, your gratitude to a benefactor, when you made such a choice ? Had you forgotten that you had heard him speak in your temple and synagogues ! how much you had admired the excellence of his discourses and the wisdom of his replies, and how deeply you had been affected with his zeal to instruct you ! Or had you forgotten, what indeed you would set a higher value upon, the regard which he had shown to your temporal interests, by miraculously healing all your diseases ? Had all these things vanished from your remembrance so speedily ; or was the merit which they discovered all cancelled ? It was but a few days before that you had honoured him with a triumphal procession into your city, and welcomed his entrance with joyful acclamations, and fervent prayers to Heaven for his safety. But now your language is changed : Let him be crucified, is your cry : let his blood be upon us and our children. Such is the power of prejudice to blind the understanding and harden the heart ; and so unstable is popular applause !

3. How odious is the character of a judge who sacrifices to his ambition his regard to justice ! Such was the conduct of Pilate,

in giving up Jesus to his enemies, by which he has brought upon himself the execration of posterity, and fixed eternal infamy upon his character. He had in his hands the power of immortalizing his name, by rescuing an innocent person and most eminent prophet from the malice of blood-thirsty enemies : his conscience dictated to him what he ought to do. But he had not virtue enough to follow its directions : he was afraid of losing the favour of the multitude, and of being deprived of the honours bestowed upon him by Cæsar. From these base and selfish motives, he condemns to death the most distinguished prophet who ever appeared in the world. It is with satisfaction we hear that this great sacrifice of conscience, which this unrighteous judge made, to his political interest and ambition, did not contribute in the least to the security or advancement of his favourite objects. We know, from good authority, that he was, not long after, removed from his government in disgrace ; sent to Rome, to answer for his crimes, and banished to Vienne, in Gaul, where, languishing for some time in great misery, he at length ended his life with his own hands.

SECTION LXXIII.

Jesus having been scourged and mocked, is led out to crucifixion.

MATTHEW xxvii. 26—34.

26. THEN released he Barabbas unto them ; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

The Romans used to scourge criminals who were to be crucified : as the latter punishment was to be inflicted upon Jesus, he was not exempted from the former. This circumstance, together with all the other particulars accompanying this transaction, shows plainly that Pilate did not deliver up Jesus to the Jews uncondemned, and suffer the Jews to crucify him, but that he passed a formal sentence upon him, and executed it himself, agreeably to the forms prescribed by the Roman law.

27. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common-hall, or, "*Prætorium*," and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

The *Prætorium* was the palace of the Roman governor, and used by him for the administration of justice. The first party of soldiers were those who accompanied the governor, in the execution of his office as judge, to preserve order, and to prevent the prisoner from being rescued. They now called to them the rest of the band, or the whole Roman cohort, which guarded the governor's palace, and consisted of between four and five hundred men.

28. And they stripped him,* *took off his upper garment*, and put on him a scarlet robe.

A purple or scarlet cloak was worn by persons of noble or royal rank : by putting such a cloak upon Jesus, they intended to ridicule his pretensions to be a king.

29. And when they had platted a crown of thorns,† they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand, and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews.

A crown of gold is a distinguished part of the dress of a king : that put upon the head of Jesus was composed of far meaner materials. In derision of his pretensions to the title of king, a reed was put into his hand, to represent a sceptre, another ensign of royalty ; and they kneeled before him, in allusion to the practice of persons presenting themselves before eastern monarchs in this humble posture.

30. And they spat upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

This last act of abuse was probably intended as a chastisement for not assuming the manners of a king, while they pretended to pay him the respect of subjects.

31. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, *i. e. his own upper garment, which was the only part of his dress which they had taken off*, and led him away to crucify him.

32. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name ; him they compelled to bear the cross.

It appears that it was usual with the Romans to make the malefactor himself carry his cross to the place of execution ; and John tells us, xix. 17, that Jesus bare his cross. But, finding him, probably, after a short time, too weak for supporting so great a burden, they compelled this Jew of Cyrene in Africa, to perform this service ; not out of any kindness to Jesus, but that he might not die with fatigue, and escape the dreadful punishment which they intended for him. Mark says, xv. 21, that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, two well-known Christians, which gives some degree of probability to the conjecture of those who suppose Simon himself to have been a follower of Jesus, and on this account to have been selected for this disgraceful employment.

* Matt. v. 40 ; ix. 20, 21. ; xiv. 36. ; xxi. 7, 8.

† See the note on John xix. 2, and Bishop Pearce on Matt. xxvii. 29.

33. And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

It was so called, because it was the place of execution. This is a Syriac word: the Latin name, mentioned by Luke, is Calvary: but they both signify the same thing.

34. They gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall; and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

Such potions as this, we are told, were commonly given to malefactors, when about to be crucified; and the design of them was to deaden the sense of pain, by producing the effect of an opiate. It was with this friendly design that it was presented to Christ; but, when he had tasted it, and discovered what it was, he refused to drink it; resolving to meet death in all its horrors; lest the value of his testimony to the truth should be destroyed or injured, by his accepting any thing that should render him insensible to pain.

REFLECTIONS.

1. It is difficult to say which is more to be admired, the insolence and barbarity of the soldiers towards Jesus, or his patience and composure in submitting to them. They had just heard him condemned to be crucified: with the nature of that punishment they were well acquainted: they knew it to be the most painful and lingering death which human ingenuity had yet discovered; for they had seen many unhappy men pass through it. Whatever was the character of the criminal, or the nature of his crime, had it been the most enormous that was ever committed, such a sentence ought to have awakened their compassion, and taught them, while they detested the crime, to pity the sufferer. This would have been their conduct, if their hearts had been impressed with the feelings of humanity. But in this case, they had heard the trial of the prisoner, and discovered that, although there was much clamour and violence against him, there was no good evidence of guilt, and that the judge, by whom he was tried, had pronounced him innocent, and shown a strong inclination to set him at liberty. These were additional motives for lenity and tenderness. As the justice of his sentence was at least doubtful, if it was not clearly unfounded, they ought to have endeavoured to soften its rigour, by mild and gentle treatment: and by abstaining from every thing that was harsh and unnecessary; yet none of these considerations seem to have had any weight with them: they make sport of a dying man: they do every thing in their power to increase and aggravate his sufferings. Having heard him accused of calling himself a king, and of assuming royal authority in opposition to Cæsar, whom they had sworn to defend, loyalty is awakened in their breasts; and under colour of this specious motive, there is no outrage too great for them to commit. They adorn him with

all the ensigns of royalty, in order to show their contempt of his pretensions : he has a scarlet robe ; but it is the old cloak of a Roman soldier, or the tattered cast-off garment of the Roman governor : he has a crown upon his head, but it is made of weeds : a sceptre in his hand ; but it is a reed : he is saluted as king, and offered the homage of an eastern monarch ; but it is to show how little he deserved either ; and all this is accompanied with the bitter sarcasms and cruel taunts of rude and vulgar minds, with blows upon his head, with spitting upon his robe, or in his face ! How unworthy was such behaviour of Romans, who called themselves civilized and polished, and denominated the rest of the world barbarians ! How unbecoming the character of men ! Why, we may be disposed to ask, does Heaven permit such wickedness ? Why does it not send down fire to consume them in a moment, open the earth to swallow them up, or send some animal more savage than themselves to tear them in pieces ? Such are the things we naturally expect to behold, after seeing the severe measures which God pursued for the protection of former prophets, and the many wonderful miracles wrought in behalf of Jesus himself : but not so has it appeared proper, for very important reasons, to him who governs the world. It was thought right to exhibit the founder of our religion in the most humiliating circumstances, that his disciples might not be surprised or offended at any insolence or abuse, which they were destined to receive from the world : the passions of men were suffered to rage against Jesus, without restraint, that he might have an opportunity of manifesting a useful example of patience under suffering, for the instruction of future generations ; for he bears all these accumulated indignities in silent composure and perfect resignation ; without remonstrating with his enemies, upon the barbarity of their treatment ; without murmuring against God for permitting it.

2. How great was the fortitude of Jesus in refusing a stupifying draught, at the moment when he was about to undergo the dreadful pains of crucifixion !

Ordinary persons would have been so overwhelmed by the near prospect of such torments, as to be deprived of their senses, and to be incapable of distinguishing the taste of what was presented to them, or, if they retained the use of their faculties, so far as to know what was given them, they would have received such a potion with gratitude, and swallowed it with eagerness. To alleviate pain, especially pain that has not been merited, is deemed excusable, if not commendable : but the sufferings of Christ were of a peculiar nature, intended by Providence to prove his integrity, and the truth of his divine mission, by showing that no violence of pain was sufficient to induce him to deny what he had before asserted ; and the force of this testimony would have been greatly weakened, if he had voluntarily declined or diminished the pains of dying : for the enemies of Christianity would then have been able to say, that the sincerity of his declarations had never been put to a severe trial. On this account he declined the humane offer which had been made to him, hereby displaying an unparalleled instance of heroic courage.

Let us learn from his example not to shrink from the sharpest

sufferings to which we may be called, in the cause of truth, or in the course of our duty.

SECTION LXXIV.

The Crucifixion.

MATTHEW xxvii. 35—50.

35. AND they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots, or "*by casting lots.*"

It was usual with the Romans to allow the soldiers who attended the execution of a malefactor, to divide his clothes among them, in nearly equal shares : this they did in the present instance, with the rest of the clothes of Jesus. But as his under garment was of peculiar value, being without seam from the top to the bottom, they chose not to divide it, but to cast lots who should have it. The remainder of this verse, taking notice of the fulfilment of a prophecy by this event, is an evident interpolation : for it is not found in the best manuscripts, nor in the oldest translations, of the New Testament. It appears to have been introduced here from John xix. 24, where we have nearly the same words.

36. And sitting down, they watched him there ;

37. And set up over his head, his accusation, written, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews."

It was usual to set up over the malefactor a white board inscribed with black letters, announcing the crime for which he suffered. Pilate orders this to be done, on the present occasion, and that the inscription shall be, King of the Jews. The Jews considered this as a national affront : for it intimated that Jesus had been acknowledged by them as their king, and that, notwithstanding their acknowledging him in that character, he suffered the most ignominious of all punishments, that of crucifixion ; and they desired Pilate, therefore, to alter it : but he refused to grant their request. John xix. 21, 22.

38. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

These were condemned to death before, but reserved for execution till the feast of the passover, because it was a public occasion, and persons from all countries were assembled at Jerusalem at that time. It has been supposed that Jesus was crucified between them both, to intimate that he was regarded as worse than both.

39. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself : if thou be

the son of God, "*since thou art the Son of God,*" (*referring to his pretensions,*) come down from the cross.

Jesus had been asked by the Jewish council, whether he were the Christ, the Son of God; and the answer which he made to that question implied that he assumed that character, i. e. that he was the Messiah. His enemies now insult him, by reminding him of this declaration, and desiring that he would maintain his claim to the high office of being the Messiah, by descending from the cross, although he was nailed to it: this they said not with any expectation or wish that he would comply with their request, but to aggravate the painful feelings of his mind, by leading him to compare his former ambitious views with his present melancholy condition. For the same reason, they remind him of another declaration, which they also considered as an empty boast, when he said that, if they destroyed the temple, he would rebuild it in three days. Shaking the head at any person was a common expression of contempt.*

41. Likewise also the chief-priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42. He saved others: himself he cannot save; if he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross; and we will believe him.

The Pharisaic scribes were actuated by the most implacable hatred against Jesus, because he condemned their interpretations of the law, exposed their hypocritical arts, and hereby destroyed their credit with the people: it was this conduct of Christ which made them resolve to put him to death; and it was the malice which this produced, that led them to attend his crucifixion, in order to enjoy the pleasure of seeing him executed. On this occasion, they could not forbear insulting a vanquished and fallen enemy: they pretend to admit that he performed miraculous cures, but add, what they thought destroyed the credibility of these accounts: for, although he delivered others from pain and death, by healing their diseases, he could not deliver himself. They promise faith in him also, if he will descend from the cross, not because they were inclined to yield to such a miracle, for they were not convinced by what was much more extraordinary, by his rising from the dead, which was attested by the most undeniable evidence; but they said this because they thought it impossible for him to move.

43. He trusted in God: let him deliver him now, if he will have him, "*if he be well-pleased with him;*" for he said, I am the Son of God.

Jesus, by acknowledging himself to be the Messiah, or the Son of God, before the Jewish council, at his trial, had assumed the character which implied that he was a favourite of Heaven: for the son is dearer to the master of the family than the servant. His

enemies now reproach him with presumption, and say, Let Heaven deliver its favourite ; thus insulting God as well as Christ.

44. The thieves, also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth, “*reproached him in the same manner.*”

According to Luke’s account of this matter, it was only one of the malefactors who reviled Christ ; and the other was so far from joining in the abuse, that he rebuked his companion. It has been supposed, therefore, that Matthew, when he speaks of thieves, uses the plural number for the singular : intending to say no more than that one of the thieves did what is here ascribed to both.* But it may not be necessary to have recourse to this method of reconciling the two evangelists ; it may be sufficient to observe that the most authentic writers, in giving an account of the same transaction, vary from each other, in less articles, while they agree in the main circumstances.

45. Now, from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land, unto the ninth hour.

According to the method of computing time here referred to, the day was reckoned to begin with sun rising, and to close with sunset, and to consist of twelve hours. The sixth hour, therefore, from sun-rising, which, at this time of the year, was six o’clock in the morning, must be, according to our method of reckoning, twelve at noon, and the ninth hour, three in the afternoon : so long this darkness lasted, or from the time Jesus was crucified until the time that he expired. This darkness could not arise from a natural eclipse of the sun, for it happened at the Jewish passover, the time of the full moon, when no eclipse of that luminary can take place : it extended, we are told, over the whole land, by which we are to understand no more than the whole land of Judea, and by no means the whole Roman empire :† to what degree it prevailed, we are not told, but, from circumstances mentioned by the evangelists, we may infer that it was not very great : for we find, from what Matthew mentions below, that it was light enough for the soldier to present a sponge to Christ, filled with vinegar, upon a reed ; and from another of the evangelists, (John xix. 25, &c.) that Jesus could see his mother and the apostle John from the cross. As this darkness was succeeded by an earthquake, it has been supposed, with considerable probability, to be of the same kind with that which frequently precedes those dreadful commotions ; when it has been observed, that the atmosphere has been so darkened as to give persons the idea of the approach of night, even at noon-day.

As this darkness was limited to Judæa, and perhaps to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, this will account for its not being noticed by Roman authors.

* See similar instances in Heb. xi. 33. 37.

† Some indeed have imagined that it reached no further than a few miles round Jerusalem : for the language of the writer is not definite.

46. And, about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, Lama Sabacthani,* that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?

These are the words of Psalm xxii: by repeating them, our Lord probably intended not to utter any complaint, which the words, when taken by themselves, seem to imply, but to refer to the whole psalm, as containing many things that were applicable to his present situation. Whoever reads that psalm will see how naturally the writer, in describing his own ill-treatment, expresses that of Christ: the revilings and insults of his enemies brought it to his recollection.

47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.

This mistake was made by some persons who were not acquainted with the language in which Jesus spoke, and who might be Jews who were come from foreign countries to Jerusalem, to keep the feast. They imagined that he called for Elias to help him in his present distress.

48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

This was done to remove the thirst of Jesus: for John tells us, xix. 28, that he had said, I thirst. The liquor was water mixed with a small and rather acid wine, a vessel full of which the Roman soldiers had brought with them to the cross, to supply their wants, while they remained here to guard the criminals. It was hence that they were led to give Jesus a sponge full of vinegar, when he complained of thirst.

49. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come, to save him.

The Jews, by misinterpreting a prophecy of Malachi, were led to expect that the prophet Elijah, who had ascended to heaven, would make his appearance among them before the Messiah. These persons seem to have entertained some kind of obscure hope that he might descend from heaven, upon the present occasion.

50. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

From its being said here, that Jesus cried with a loud voice, the moment before he died, some have inferred, that his bodily strength was very little impaired, and that he shortened his sufferings by preternaturally bringing on dissolution, or that God interposed in a supernatural manner for that purpose: they imagine that the language of the evangelist gives some countenance to this supposi-

* The dialect spoken in Judea at this time, was probably a mixture of Hebrew, Chaldee, and Syriac; but principally composed of the latter.

tion, in saying that he yielded up the ghost ; as if it had been a voluntary act, and he had dismissed his spirit. But the words in the original signify no more than he gave up the breath, which was a common phrase among the Greeks for dying : the loud cry which Jesus is said to have uttered, was probably of a convulsive nature, and might proceed from the agonies of death : it is not uncommon, I believe, in other instances. That Jesus should die before the others that were crucified with him, has nothing in it surprising, if we consider how much he had suffered from his agony in the garden, and the outrage of the Jews and of the Roman soldiers, in conjunction with his peculiar sensibility of mind. Besides, to suppose that Christ voluntarily put an end to his sufferings, would detract much from his merit in suffering, and from the utility of his example : for the conduct of one who bore all the pains of a violent death, is much more encouraging to a disciple who is called to the like trial, than that of a Master, who put an end to his sufferings as soon as they became painful. This, if it were true, would do much towards justifying suicide.

REFLECTIONS.

WE have in these verses an affecting view of what our Master endured from bodily pain and from the cruel insults of his enemies. Whatever outrages they might have been disposed to offer him before, we might have imagined, that when they saw him upon the cross, unable to move, tortured with pain, and a spectacle of public infamy, some sentiments of tenderness and compassion would have entered their hearts. This was certainly enough to satisfy the most inveterate malice ! Surely they will now suffer him to enjoy the reflections of his own mind, and allow him to call to his assistance every consideration which can afford him consolation in his present dreadful circumstances ; but not so thought his enemies ; they are resolved to pursue him to the last, and to aggravate, by derision and insult, those sufferings, which are already too great for human nature to support. We find the common people passing to and fro before his cross, wagging their heads, in token of scorn and contempt, and calling upon him to help himself, if he can. “What is become of your miraculous powers and lofty pretensions now ? They have fled from you, when you most needed their aid. You proclaim yourself the Son of God and the favourite of heaven : give some proof of your interest in that favour, by coming down from the cross. Surely God would not suffer a favourite servant to endure such sufferings !” Such was the malicious language and unfeeling behaviour of the common people, who could, assuredly, be only some of the servants or dependents of the scribes and priests, and who were set on by their masters. But, although *they* were guilty of such baseness and cruelty as to insult over a dying man, we expect that men of rank and education will take no part in the business : they will undoubtedly abstain from language which disgraces the lowest of the vulgar, and is only worthy of the untutored sav-

age. Yet we find that the teachers of the law, the ministers of religion, and the members of the highest court of justice, mix with the populace on this occasion, adopt their language, and countenance and foment their outrages. That Jesus was not affected by such language, cannot be supposed : their words entered his soul, as the iron did his body : yet he made no reply to their abuse, but bore it all with that dignified composure which he had manifested throughout his sufferings : he left to time and to his heavenly Father to put to shame the triumphs of his enemies, and to convince them that he was as much the favourite of heaven, while hanging upon the cross, as when he was performing the most illustrious miracles, and followed by the hosannas of the multitude.

SECTION LXXV.

Miracles attending the Crucifixion.

MATTHEW xxvii. 51—56.

51. AND, behold ! the vail of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom.

This is generally understood to be the curtain which separated the holy place from the most holy ; although there was another curtain placed before the porch for entering into the temple. This effect might be produced by the shaking of the temple with the earthquake.

And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, “*were split.*”

These violent convulsions were intended to mark the displeasure of heaven at what had taken place : some traces of this earthquake are said to be visible at Jerusalem, at the present day.

52. And the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints which slept, arose,

53. And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

Michaelis, a learned German critic, explains this account in the following manner : on the day in which Jesus died, many graves, or rather sepulchres, (for such were the burying-places used by the Jews,) of persons lately dead, were opened by the violent earthquake which happened immediately upon that event. Their bodies were seen, for several days afterwards, in the open sepulchres, but were soon afterwards missing : about this time, however, several of their friends and acquaintance, who had been lately dead, appeared to some pious persons in Jerusalem, in a dream, telling them that they were returned to life ; and as their bodies were no

where to be found, they concluded that they were actually risen from the dead : and Matthew therefore relates in this story, only what he heard.

Others have supposed, that as one resurrection from the dead might give rise to reports of many others, this was the case in regard to the resurrection of Christ ; and Matthew relates only what was commonly reported and credited at Jerusalem.

54. Now when the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly, this was the Son, "*a son*," of God.

The centurion having observed the miracles which took place at the death of Jesus, concluded not only that he was innocent of the crimes for which he suffered, but that he was some extraordinary person ; and, being a Roman, and having heard much about the intercourse between gods and men, imagined that he must have been the son of a god, after this manner.* In this sense, must we understand Son of God in the mouth of a Roman, who could know nothing of the claim of Jesus to this peculiar appellation as the Messiah. What alarmed him, and the soldiers under his command, was the apprehension that Heaven, by these miracles, testified its displeasure at the deed which has just been committed. He might possibly have heard also that Jesus acknowledged himself to be the Son of God before the Jewish council.

55. And many women were there beholding, "*looking on*," afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him ;

Luke viii. 3, explains to us what we are to understand by ministering to him : for he mentions certain women who followed Jesus, and ministered to him of their substance. This they did, partly out of gratitude to Jesus, who had cured them of different diseases, and stood in need of their assistance, having nothing of his own, and partly from motives of benevolence, to enable him to perform the same services for others. It was their custom to accompany him while travelling throughout the country, to preach the gospel ; and they had now followed him, with the same view, in his last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The same affection to their benefactor induced them to be the sorrowful spectators of his sufferings and death. They were not allowed to come near the cross, because it was surrounded with soldiers, to guard against any attempt to rescue the body of the criminal.

56. Among which was Mary Magdalene, "*of Magdala*," a town of Judæa, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

* See Dan. iii. 25, and Virgil's *Æneid*, iv. 12.

Jesus had cured Mary of Magdala of outrageous and inveterate madness, expressed in the gospel by being possessed by seven dæmons.

Salome (compare Mark xv. 40) is described as the mother of the sons of Zebedee, rather than as the wife of Zebedee, because the sons of Zebedee, James and John, being two of the apostles, were better known among Christians than their father. It appears, from the gospel of John, that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was here upon this occasion, and that this evangelist himself was present, John xix. 25, 26. The James, mentioned in this verse, was the apostle elsewhere called James the less.

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE see that even when Christ appears to be abandoned to the malice of his enemies, divine testimonials were not long wanting, to prove that he is still the beloved Son of God. Already are the heavens veiled with darkness, as if ashamed to behold the unrighteous deed ; soon does the earth tremble, as if unwilling to sustain the feet of such daring offenders. Christ, in the midst of his sufferings, still calls God, his God ; and these events show that he is still worthy of the appellation of his Son.—Although deserted by most of his earthly friends, he is not alone—for the Father is with him.

From these extraordinary appearances at the crucifixion of Jesus, let us learn to reverence him. God does not suffer him to be injured and insulted, without testifying his displeasure, by sensible and visible appearances : let us take care how we slight the message of one, who has so many testimonials that he is authorized and supported by God.

2. We learn with pleasure, from this part of the gospel history, that our Master was not deserted by all his friends, in the last moments of his life. His twelve disciples forsook him and fled when he was first apprehended. Of those two whom a sense of shame brought back to him, and who followed at a distance, to see what would become of him, one publicly denied having any connexion with him, and retired from sight, full of fear, shame, and remorse. The multitude, who once followed him with their hosannas, all disappeared, or joined his enemies in reviling him : yet, amidst this combination of enemies and desertion of friends, there were a few who ventured to discover their attachment, by attending upon him while upon the cross, and exposed themselves to all the odium of being called his disciples ; and, to the honour of the female sex, those few were women, who displayed more fortitude and courage on this occasion, than those who boast of it as their characteristic excellence. These women would not forsake him, while there appeared any remains of life ; and they afterwards followed to see him laid in the tomb. This, although a silent, was a public testimony of the merit of the sufferer, and must have afforded him consolation in the agony of death. These marks of attachment proceeded from the most honourable motives, from esteem for his character, and gratitude for benefits received : such instances of virtuous conduct afford us the more

satisfaction, as they appear amidst so many affecting examples of weakness and depravity. They show, that however human nature may be degraded in some men by cowardice, malice, and cruelty, it is capable of fortitude, gratitude, and friendship ; and thus they vindicate the character of the Almighty from any aspersions, on account of the vices of his offspring.

SECTION LXXVI.

Jesus is laid in the sepulchre, and a guard placed over it.

MATTHEW xxvii. 57—66.

57. WHEN the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple ;

58. He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus : then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

We are told by Luke, xxiii. 50, 51, that this person was a counsellor, but did not consent to the counsel and deed of them ; i. e. he was a member of the privy counsel, appointed to assist the Roman governor with its advice in the administration of affairs ; and when this council advised Pilate to yield to the clamour of the Jews, by ordering Jesus to be crucified, he had expressed a contrary opinion, or at least, had not concurred in their proceedings. On the present occasion, he gave a fresh proof of his fortitude and resolution, by asking for the body of Jesus ; and the greater his wealth, and the higher his rank, the more virtuous was his conduct. For although, in making this request, he had nothing to dread from the displeasure of Pilate, who had already shown himself favourably disposed towards Jesus, yet such a mark of attachment could not fail to make him extremely obnoxious to the chief priests and elders, to the Scribes and Pharisees, and other chief men among his countrymen. If Joseph, or some other friend, had not made this request, the body of Jesus would have been cast into the common grave, with the malefactors. The Romans used to suffer the bodies of criminals executed upon the cross, to remain there until they perished by the influence of the sun and the rain : but out of respect to the Jews, whose law prohibited their suffering a person that was hanged on a tree, to remain there all night, (Deut. xxi. 23,) they permitted them to be buried. Joseph's request was a proof that he considered Jesus as dead ; and Pilate's compliance with it, shows that he had obtained satisfactory evidence of the same fact. Compare John xix. 33, 34.

59. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapt it in a clean linen cloth.

The most apparently trivial circumstance relating to so distinguished a person as Jesus, is interesting, not only while he is living, but also after he is dead : yet this is not the reason why the manner in which his dead body was treated is here recorded ; but to satisfy us that he was really dead, in order to afford better evidence of his resurrection. If Joseph, as appears hence, proceeded to treat Jesus in the same manner as other dead bodies were treated among the Jews, this is a plain proof that he considered him as reduced to that state. As the body was only wrapped in linen, and not laid in a coffin, there was the less room for any kind of fraud. The custom of burying in linen, continues among the Jews to the present day.

60. And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock ;

Some of the graves of the Jews were caves, or holes in the ground. Others were cavities cut in the sides of rocks : of this kind was that in which Jesus was laid ; and it was the best that could be used for the purpose, to prevent all suspicion of mistake or fraud. It was a new tomb, which Joseph had provided for himself or his family, but in which no one had yet been laid ; so that we are sure that it must be Jesus who rose, since one body could not be mistaken for another ; and there was no room for such an event as once took place, when the body of a man was raised to life, by touching the bones of a prophet. (See 2 Kings, xiii. 21.) It was also hewn out of a rock ; so that there was no access to it but by one entrance, which was afterwards guarded by soldiers ; and, therefore, his disciples could not secretly convey him away.

And he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

The design of placing the stone here was to cover the mouth of the sepulchre, to prevent the dead body from being carried away : and therefore, it was provided of such magnitude, that it could not be easily removed ; at least, not without making a noise, and creating an alarm.

61. And there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

The putting of Jesus into the tomb, was not a private transaction, so as to afford Joseph an opportunity of practising any fraud, but was performed in the presence of witnesses, who saw the body lodged in the sepulchre. The women here mentioned were the friends of Jesus : we may be sure also, that his enemies would be careful to observe what was done with the body.

62. Now the next day that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

That is, on the sabbath-day, and probably soon after the sabbath began, on the evening of our Saturday ; at least before the night : for if they had not applied to Pilate till the next day, the design,

about which they were alarmed, might have been accomplished during the night, and all future precautions rendered useless. The preceding day was called the day of preparation, because it was the day in which they prepared for the sabbath, by laying in a stock of provisions, and doing other things which were necessary, before a day of entire cessation from business. It might likewise be distinguished by this name, because in it they prepared for the seven days of unleavened bread, which were to follow the pass-over : the following transaction seems to have been the work not of the whole Sanhedrim, but of a considerable number only of the members.

63. Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

Jesus had said this to his disciples in private : but he had never declared plainly in public, that he should rise again after three days. It is true, that when the Jews asked for a sign, he told them that no sign should be given them, except the sign of the prophet Jonas ; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth ; and when, at the first passover, they required a miracle from him to prove his divine mission, he replied, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it again. Both these declarations were obscure predictions of his resurrection in three days ; yet they seem to have been sufficiently understood by his enemies to create a fear of that event ; or perhaps they might gather it from something which Judas told them. In whatever manner the prophecy was delivered, it is a plain proof that Christ intended no imposture : for had that been the case, he would never have published his intentions, which would only afford his enemies an opportunity of defeating his designs. That by the expression, after three days, is meant the third day, is evident from 2 Chron. x. 5.

64. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead ; so the last error, "*the last imposture,*" shall be worse than the first.

If a belief should be imposed on the people, that Jesus was risen from the dead, this would be of more dangerous consequence than his false pretensions to be the Messiah.

65. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch : go your way ; make it as sure as ye can.

In their application to Pilate they had intimated the propriety of having a guard set over the sepulchre, to prevent the disciples from stealing away their Master ; and Pilate thinks their proposal reasonable, and tells them to use for this purpose the Roman cohort, which, at every festival, was stationed at the temple to prevent

tumults. Use it, in whatever way you think proper, to obtain the security you wish for.

66. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch.

As Pilate had allowed them to adopt what measures they thought proper for the security of the sepulchre, by means of the temple-guard, we could not have doubted that every method which prudence could suggest would be used to prevent any fraud from being practised by his disciples. We find in fact that this was the case: for they set a guard of soldiers over the sepulchre, whose business it should be to watch the tomb, and to resist by force any attempt that might be made to rescue the body. Lest these guards, although Roman soldiers, and, therefore, not likely to form any conspiracy among themselves, should be corrupted by others to join in or to connive at any fraud, a seal was set upon the stone, which, if it were broken, would show that some human power had been employed in opening the tomb, and hereby defeat the purpose of the conspirators.*

REFLECTIONS.

1. WE may observe how vain are the efforts of man, in opposition to the designs of God, or rather, how he makes use of that opposition for accomplishing more effectually his own purposes. By putting Jesus to death, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews thought they had effectually crushed their enemy: but God takes occasion hence to raise him from the dead, and to exalt him to greater dignity and power than before. By inflicting upon him the most ignominious of punishments, a public crucifixion, they thought that they had for ever disgraced his pretensions, and effectually discouraged his disciples: but a public execution, by affording the best evidence of his death, established the truth of his resurrection from the dead. By placing a guard of soldiers at his tomb, and sealing the stone with their own seal, they hoped to destroy the credit of every report which might afterwards prevail about his resurrection: but this proved the means of making it believed. So completely were they baffled in all their attempts to oppose the will of Heaven; and so effectually did Providence overrule these attempts for accomplishing what they were intended to defeat!

If we remember these circumstances, we shall cease to be offended at the cross of Christ: on the contrary, we shall find it to be the power of God and the wisdom of God. To suffer a person, who had lived in so innocent and exemplary a manner, to die like a malefactor, by cruel torments and a public execution, may appear, at first view, inconsistent with that equity and goodness which we ascribe to the Divine proceedings. If, however, we consider

* See Dan. vi. 17.

that the resurrection of Christ from the dead, was necessary to prove the resurrection of his followers, and that in order to prove the certainty of Christ's resurrection, it was necessary to ascertain his death, we shall then see the necessity of his dying in a public manner, in the presence both of friends and enemies, so as to leave no doubt of the fact : hence the necessity of his being crucified ; for in no other way could this circumstance be so well ascertained. By this consideration the mystery of the cross is unfolded ; and the plan of Providence respecting Jesus completely justified.

2. From what has taken place in regard to the death of Christ, let us learn to rely upon the wisdom of Divine Providence under the most unpromising circumstances. Nothing could appear more unlikely, than that the doctrine of one who died upon the cross as a malefactor, should meet with a general reception, and overthrow every other system of religious faith which had been established in the world for so many ages : yet this we find to have been the case : Providence employed that very circumstance as the principal mean of accomplishing this important design : it was brought about by the cross of Christ. However melancholy and alarming then our situation may be, either as a nation or as individuals, let us not give up ourselves to despair : God can bring light out of darkness, and good out of seeming evil. Let us cheerfully trust in him, and wait patiently for the time when his plan shall be unravelled.

SECTION LXXVII.

The Resurrection.

MATTHEW xxviii. 1—10.

1. IN the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, "*after the end of the week, as the first day of the next week began to dawn,*" came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.

The Jewish sabbath ended at six o'clock on Saturday night : agreeably to that command of the Mosaic law, Lev. xxiii. 32, "from even to even shall ye celebrate your sabbath." This period, which was the end of the sabbath, was also the end of one week and the beginning of another. It is of the time which corresponds to our Sunday morning, that the evangelist here speaks, and at which the women went to the sepulchre. Their object in going thither so early, was to know whether the body remained there ; intending, if they found it there, to return, and to embalm it with the spices which they had provided, as soon as possible. This was necessary in order to render that process effectual to the

purpose for which it was designed, namely, the preservation of the body from putrefaction. They seem to have imagined that Jesus was taken from the cross, and laid in this new sepulchre, only out of regard to the sabbath, and that it was the intention of his friends to remove him to some other place afterwards. It is plain, therefore, that they had heard nothing of the guard of soldiers, which had been placed there, and of the seal which had been affixed to the stone.

2. And, behold, there was, "*there had been,*" *before the women came there*, a great earthquake : for the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and gone and rolled back the stone from the door, "*from the entrance,*" and was sitting upon it.

The same almighty power, which raised Christ from the dead, could have removed the stone which confined him, without the ministration of an angel : but the appearance of this angel, and the earthquake which preceded it, were necessary to strike terror into the guard, and to prevent them from attempting to detain Jesus after he was risen ; which they might have been inclined to do, in consequence of the strict charge which they had received, when set to watch. As these extraordinary appearances took place before the women came to the sepulchre, the evangelist must have acquired the knowledge of them from some other source : most probably from some of the soldiers, who although paid to keep silence, might yet divulge the secret, or might have mentioned these circumstances before they were bribed by the priests and elders. Matthew has not told us the exact time when Jesus was raised to life, whether it was during the earthquake, before or after the descent of the angel ; nor is it a matter of any importance to be informed when it happened.

3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.

That is, light darted from his countenance, as it does from the lightning : and his clothes were perfectly luminous. It is generally supposed that this angel was one of a superior order of beings, who have their general residence with God in heaven, but who are occasionally sent down to perform services for him in this world : others have supposed that, as this appearance had the figure and voice of a man, he was no more than a man miraculously created for the occasion by divine power, and said to descend from heaven, because he appeared to come from the sky or air.

4. And, for fear of him, the keepers, "*the guard,*" did shake, and become as dead men.

That is, The soldiers trembled through fear, and became as incapable of moving from the ground upon which they stood, as if they had been dead men : not that they actually swooned away, as some have supposed. This effect seems to have been produced entirely by the angel's splendid and supernatural appearance ; for

we do not find that he spoke to them at all. They probably expected that he was come to execute signal vengeance upon them.

5. And the angel answered, and said unto the women, Fear not ye : for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.

The women were alarmed, as well as the guards, by the appearance of this extraordinary stranger, who, although he had lost much of that splendour which terrified those who beheld him, still retained enough to denote a supernatural origin. While they stood at a distance, through fear, or were upon the point of retiring, he calls upon them to dismiss their fears : telling them, that although the guards, who were placed at the tomb by the enemies of Jesus, and for a hostile purpose, had good reason to be alarmed, and had done well to depart as soon as they had in some degree recovered from their fright, yet there was no occasion for them to be terrified, who were the followers of Jesus, and came there from affection to their Master, and with a view to do him honour.

6. He is not here : for he is risen, as he said ;

Or, rather, He is raised up : for Christ did not raise himself from the dead, but was raised by the power of the Father. He had often told his disciples that after he was crucified, he should rise again from the dead : but they did not understand his words ; and none of them had any expectation of such an event. As he often spoke to them in figurative language, when he spoke of his death, they probably understood not a natural death, but his being overwhelmed with some great calamity, and by a resurrection, his emerging from it.

Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Not merely the spot upon which his body was laid : for to look at that would not confirm their faith in his resurrection, but to satisfy themselves that he was gone, or risen, by examining the sepulchre in which his body was laid, and the grave-clothes which he had left behind, and the orderly manner in which they were folded up, which those who had stolen the body would have been in too much haste to do.

7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead. And, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him.

Inform all his disciples immediately of this glorious event ; that they may not any longer entertain a suspicion of his being an impostor, which some might have been ready to conclude, when they saw him crucified. Tell them, moreover, that, in order to confirm their faith in his resurrection, he will give them all an opportunity of seeing him, not at Jerusalem, where many might be disposed to wait for that favour, for he does not mean to show himself openly to the Jews in that city, but in Galilee, as he has already told you, Matt. xxvi. 32. It was in Galilee, probably, that Jesus was seen

by the five hundred brethren at once, whom Paul mentions, and whom he met by appointment. This message from the angel, directing them to go to Galilee, was addressed to the disciples of Christ in general, and not particularly to the apostles: for he appeared to them the same day.

Lo, I have told you.

Christ foretold it to you; and I, who am a messenger from God, foretel it again; that you may inform those who question the authority of what you say.

8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre, *“out of the tomb,” for they went into it at the desire of the angel*, with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word.

Their fear arose from their having seen an angel, an extraordinary sight, which was thought by the Jews to forebode evil to the person who was thus distinguished, and their joy from the intelligence which he gave them.

9. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! *“Peace be unto you.”* And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him, *“did him homage.”*

To infer hence that Mary Magdalene and the other women considered Jesus as God, and intended to pay him divine honours, or that they considered him as any thing more than a man, would be a hasty conclusion: for we find the same respect paid to other prophets.* The word “worship” does not exclusively express supreme homage or respect, either in common life or in the language of Scripture, but signifies civil respect as well as religious adoration.† Hence magistrates are still called *worshipful*, i. e. deserving of respect. For a person to fall down upon his knees, or to prostrate himself upon his face, in the presence of another, is a common token of respect, in eastern countries, to kings and great personages. This was the whole of what was done in the present instance; and no more was intended by it than a strong testimony of respect, proceeding from the discovery just made of the extraordinary character of Jesus.

10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid, go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

“Be not alarmed at meeting me, on this occasion; for it is not a spirit that you behold, but me, your Master.” He calls his disciples brethren, to intimate to them that, notwithstanding the high honours which had been lately conferred upon him, by raising him from the dead, yet they were the common children of one Father, who intended the same privileges for all his offspring of the human

* 2 Kings, iv. 27.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 20.

race : he gives the same direction to his disciples which had been sent them before by the angel, respecting their meeting him in Galilee.

The evangelists agree with each other in regard to the main fact of the resurrection of Jesus, on the first day of the week, but vary considerably with respect to particulars of time, of place, and of other less circumstances relating to his own appearance, and that of the angels, to the women. I have not pointed out these variations, nor attempted to reconcile them, because I do not think them material: they are obvious to every one who will read the accounts given of the resurrection by the four evangelists, and compare them together. I shall only observe here, although the observation is applicable to many other parts of the gospel-history, that persons of the strictest fidelity, in giving a narration of a transaction to which they were witnesses, while they agree in respect to the main business, always differ in their account of particulars; the memory of some being more retentive than that of others; the minds of different persons being differently affected by the same events; and some attending most to one thing, others, to another. We have reason, therefore, to expect that there would be a like variation in the narrative of these women, in relating what they saw at the tomb of Jesus, or what occurred soon afterwards; especially when we recollect that they were now much terrified, which would prevent them from attending to particular circumstances so well as at another time. Hence, as the evangelists must take their accounts from different individuals, and each of them strictly adhered to his own authority, their histories necessarily vary in regard to particulars. This variation, however, is so far from destroying the credibility of the first witnesses, or in consequence, that of those who wrote after them, that it tends to confirm their testimony, by showing that they did not combine to tell a common story, the variations being no greater than those which take place in what are deemed authentic accounts. It ought also to be remembered that the truth of our Lord's resurrection does not wholly, or principally, depend upon the testimony of these women, but upon that of the apostles, who all saw him alive.

REFLECTIONS.

1. LET us here notice the strong evidence, arising from the facts just mentioned, for the resurrection of Jesus. He is seen alive by those who were intimately acquainted with him, within three days after he died, while he was fresh in their memories, while a guard of soldiers was strictly watching his tomb, while his disciples were full of consternation at his death, and in no state of mind for planning any scheme of imposture: within this short period also he walks abroad, in perfect health, with all his wounds cured, and as well as if nothing had happened to him. What stronger evidence could we have of a miraculous interposition of divine power?

Some may perhaps regret that Jesus did not remain longer in the grave, and may imagine, in particular, that if he had continued there until putrefaction had taken place, his resurrection would have been rendered more striking: but the evidence we now have would have been impaired, rather than strengthened by such a delay of the event. Wherever there is actual death, a resurrection is as much proof of divine power at one period as at another, at the end of three days as at the end of three weeks. If, however, the resurrection of Jesus had been delayed, it might have been said that the disciples had time to recover from their consternation, and to contrive some scheme for removing the body, and that their design might be favoured by the negligence of the guard, who would relax their attention in the course of time. It might also be said that there would be time for him to recover from an apparent death. But the short interval which passed between the time of his death and that of his resurrection, leaves no room for any of these suppositions. For Jesus, after hanging several hours upon the cross on Friday, and appearing to be dead, both to his friends and enemies, was wrapt up in a linen cloth, and laid in a cold sepulchre on the evening of the same day, where he remained, strictly guarded by a company of soldiers: yet on Sunday morning he appears alive again, and is perfectly recovered from the effects of his crucifixion. Granting that he might not have been dead at first, yet it was impossible that in so short a time he should be so far recovered from the severe wounds which he received in his hands and in his feet, to say nothing of that in his side, without the miraculous interposition of divine power; and if we allow of a miracle in any case, we may as well admit it in regard to his being raised from the dead.

2. Justly did Divine Providence favour these pious women with the first news of the resurrection of Jesus: this was a proper reward for the attachment and zeal of those who attended him, when deserted by other friends, who followed him to the place of execution, and never left the cross while he lived. Great must have been their transport of joy, when they heard from the angel that he was alive, and when they saw before them many evidences of that fact; but greater still when they saw him themselves, when they heard his voice and felt his person, so as to have left in their minds no doubt of his actual resurrection!—But

3. Who can describe or conceive what Jesus felt, upon the present occasion, when he returned to life, after having been crucified? How great must have been his satisfaction to recollect, that his labours and sufferings were all finished, and that God, his heavenly Father, had so highly approved of his zeal and diligence in the one, and of his patience under the other, as to raise him from the dead! With what pleasure must he recollect that the prophecy which he delivered so often, and upon the truth of which he rested his pretensions to be the Messiah, is accomplished, that the fears and suspicions of his friends will now be dissipated, the calumnies of his enemies be refuted, and their malicious hopes disappointed!

Others had been raised from the dead as well as he : but they were raised to a short life, speedily terminated by a second death ; whereas Jesus rises to die no more. They returned to life, to struggle with sin and temptation, with much suffering and many trials : but when Christ rises, his warfare is already accomplished. He enters upon a new and superior existence, in which he shall experience none of these evils, where he shall have no enemies to contend with, no pain to endure : he is about to ascend, in a new and glorified body, to his Father in heaven, where he will be beyond the reach of all mortal cares and afflictions, where he shall enjoy the most evident tokens of divine favour, where he shall behold the triumph of his religion over its first enemies, and over every other attempt that shall be made to corrupt or destroy it, and where he will at length meet an immense company of his disciples, which no man can number, from every people, nation, and tongue under heaven, all saved from destruction, and made for ever happy, by his doctrines and sufferings. Joyful indeed must the feelings of Jesus have been with these views of the past, and these prospects of the future ! Such also will one day, be your feelings, Christians, if you are his genuine disciples : for you are his brethren, possessed of the same nature, joint heirs of the same promises, destined to live for ever with him in the same place : when you rise from the dead, you will have before you nearly the same prospects which your Master had, and experience the same delightful feelings.

SECTION LXXVIII.

*The guards bribed to say, that the body of Jesus had been stolen.
He appears to his disciples in Galilee.*

MATTHEW xxviii. 11—20.

11. Now when they, *the women*, were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

That is, The earthquake, the vision of angels, the removal of the stone, and the disappearance of the body. These things seemed to them so extraordinary that they thought proper to call together the whole Sanhedrim, that they might deliberate upon what was to be done.

12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money, "*a good sum of money*," unto the soldiers,

13. Saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away, while we slept :

This story is in the highest degree incredible: for, considering how strict the military discipline of the Romans was, and that such offences as sleeping upon guard were punished with death, it is not probable that a whole band of soldiers would suffer themselves to fall asleep, and risk the penalties of so severe a law; even allowing that they kept guard the whole night, and especially if they remained at the sepulchre no more than three or four hours. But there are other difficulties of no less weight; it does not appear, from the preceding history, that the disciples of Jesus expected his resurrection, although he had often foretold it: they would, therefore, have no temptation to invent the scheme which is here imputed to them: or, if they had contrived it, being without arms, and discouraged by the late events, they would not have had the resolution, or rather the stupidity, to attempt to execute it. They must have foreseen how unable twelve men were to contend with a whole band of soldiers: their only hopes of success must have been built upon finding the guard asleep: but even then they must have been aware that the removal of the stone must occasion a noise that would awake them, as it was so large that several women despaired of being able to remove it. Further, if they had succeeded in obtaining the body, they would probably have been discovered in carrying it away; for, although night, it was the time of full moon, when so many persons assembled to keep the passover, that the houses in Jerusalem would not lodge them, but they were obliged to spend the night in the open air, in the streets of Jerusalem, or the neighbouring gardens. Nor would conveying away the body be sufficient for their purpose, unless they could also show Jesus alive, which was not in their power. Upon the whole, then, this story, which the Jewish council put into the mouths of the soldiers, is attended with every circumstance of improbability; to say nothing of the absurdity of men's pretending to know what took place while they were asleep. Weak indeed must be that cause which admits of no better defence than this!

14. And if this come to the governor's ears, "*if this affair be brought to a hearing before the governor,*" we will persuade him, *i. e. to excuse you for a neglect of duty*, and secure you.

If the soldiers asserted, according to this direction, that the body of Jesus was taken from the sepulchre while they slept, they acknowledged that they had been guilty of a gross neglect of duty, for which they were likely to be called to an account by the Roman governor, who would inflict upon them the punishment of the law. To remove their apprehensions upon this subject, the Jewish priests assure them that they will undertake to satisfy the governor, and to screen them from danger; a promise which the council might very well make, in regard to so corrupt a governor as Pontius Pilate.

15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught, and this saying, "*this account,*" is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

If it should be asked, how Matthew came to be acquainted with these secret transactions, since the soldiers were enjoined not to publish them, and did as they were taught, or how he could know what took place at the sepulchre before the women came there, which must depend entirely upon the account of the soldiers, it may be answered, with respect to the private bargain between the Jewish council and the soldiers, that, although enjoined secrecy, they might not all of them observe it, and the evangelist might take his account from what was reported to him by the soldiers themselves, or from some other person, to whom they related what had passed ; or some members of the council might divulge the secret. In regard to what took place at the sepulchre, at the resurrection of Jesus, it may be observed that there were only some of the guard who went to the high-priests : the rest went home, and laid themselves under no obligation to conceal what they had seen. Besides, there was a considerable interval between the time at which Jesus rose and that at which the council met, in which time they might all have mentioned to their acquaintance whom they saw, what had taken place ; which they would be the more inclined to do, as the events were of a very extraordinary nature.

16. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

The eleven only are here mentioned as assembling to meet Christ in Galilee : but it is highly probable that there was a much larger number of disciples ; for it was known that Christ would show himself there, he having told them, both before his death, and since his resurrection, by means of the women, that he would meet them in Galilee. This would naturally bring together as many of his disciples, to see him, as were able to attend. It was, on this occasion, probably, that he was seen by above five hundred at once, of whom Paul speaks, 1 Cor. xv. 9 : this was more likely to take place in Galilee than in any other part of the country ; for, having exercised the greatest part of his public ministry in Galilee, the majority of his disciples resided there. This circumstance also points out the reason of his fixing upon this spot, rather than upon Jerusalem, for his appearance to his disciples : a greater number could be assembled there ; and he chose a mountain for this interview, because there would be room for as many to see him as chose to come, and they might assemble without opposition.

17. And, when they saw him, they worshipped him, (*see verse 9,*) "*fell down and did him homage :*" But some doubted.

These were some who, on account of the distance of Jesus, or the crowd which surrounded him, could not obtain a distinct view of him, and, therefore, doubted whether he were not some other person, and not the divine teacher with whom they were acquainted, and whom they knew to be crucified. To remove their doubts, we are told, in the next verse, Christ came near to them, and most probably permitted them to satisfy themselves, in the same manner

as he had permitted Thomas, by feeling the marks of the wounds in his hands and his feet. That they were by this or some other means satisfied that he was the same Jesus who had been crucified, is evident : for they all bore testimony to the reality of his resurrection ; and we never hear of their doubts any more. The fairness and integrity of the evangelist, are conspicuous upon this occasion : he does not scruple to mention that some had doubts, although he knew the advantage that would be taken of this circumstance, to question the truth of his history. The care of Jesus to satisfy his disciples that he was actually risen, also deserves notice. Lest the surprise of a sudden and unexpected appearance should deprive them of perfect recollection, or prevent them from considering the subject coolly and deliberately, he appoints a time and place for meeting them, at sufficient distance from the time when he was first said to be risen ; in order that they might have an opportunity of considering what evidence would satisfy them, and of putting to him what questions they pleased. The doubts of the disciples of Christ, respecting his resurrection, give an additional weight to their succeeding testimony : for they show that they were not credulous, or hasty in believing.

18. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Some have supposed Christ to mean, by these words, that universal power was given him over all beings and over all worlds ; so as to be able to alter the course of the sun, if he pleased, or to change the arrangement of the stars, and to have the fates of empires on the earth at his disposal : but this would be to suppose him invested with all the powers of the Almighty, which cannot be admitted. Such general expressions, when they occur in Scripture, are to be limited and explained by the subject to which they refer.* When Christ, authorizing his disciples to preach the gospel in all nations, says, that all power was given to him in heaven and earth, he must mean all the power that was necessary for that purpose, or that could have respect to that object. He must either refer to the miraculous gifts which he received from God, and communicated to his apostles, in order to enable them to propagate his religion in all countries, or to his being invested with a supreme power of governing the minds of men by means of his laws, both among Jews and in the heathen nations, which, in the prophetic language of Scripture, are called heaven and earth.

19. Go ye, therefore, and teach, “*make disciples of,*” all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, “*Holy Spirit ;*”

Baptize them, upon the profession of that religion which came from the Father as its author, which was communicated to the world by Jesus Christ, and confirmed by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. By this commission, the apostles were authorized to

* John xvi. 13.—1 John ii. 20, are passages illustrative of this remark.

admit proselytes from all nations, from Gentiles as well as Jews. It seems, however, that they did not understand it in this comprehensive sense: for they confined their preaching, for some time, to the Jewish nation, until Peter was instructed, by a vision, to extend it to other nations. By the words, *all nations*, therefore, in Christ's commission, they must have understood Jews of all nations: this people being dispersed in considerable numbers through every part of the world. The administration of baptism to infants is not here mentioned: yet, as it was customary with the Jews to baptize the children of proselytes to their religion as well as their parents, the apostles would consider them as included; and if Jesus had intended that they should not be baptized, he must have given an express prohibition to that effect, of which, however, there appear to be no traces.

20. Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you always, unto the end of the world.

The words here rendered *end of the world*, may be translated the end of the age, and may refer to the continuance of the Jewish polity, or age. During this time, Christ promises to be with his apostles, not in person, for he ascended into heaven, but metaphorically with them, by the miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit. In like manner does he speak of the same powers, in another place: after saying, John xiv. 16, 17, 18, I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the spirit of the truth, he adds, I will not leave you comfortless: I will come unto you: meaning no more, by promising to be with them, than that the Spirit should be with them: it was in the same manner he promised to be with them now. In confirmation of this interpretation, it has been observed, that the miraculous powers continued no longer in the church than the period of the destruction of the Jewish polity, which was indeed the period of the apostolic age: for none of the apostles survived that event, except the evangelist John.

REFLECTIONS.

SOME of the remarks of Dr. Lardner, upon the first part of that portion of the evangelist which has been read to you, are so just, that I shall give them in his own words:

1. "Sad is the condition of a people, when their rulers and teachers practise themselves, and recommend to others, falsehood, and prevarication, and other wickedness.

"Such conduct we see in the Jewish rulers. They had before given money to Judas, to induce him to betray into their hands an innocent and excellent person, and also sought for false witness to put him to death. Here is another like instance of their disregard to all religious obligations. Now they have to do with heathens,

Roman soldiers, and they put into their mouths a downright falsehood, and tempt them with money, and give them a large sum to say as they directed them. We may charitably hope that it was not the act of all the Jewish council, or of every one in it : but it is a deliberate thing ; and there is a general concurrence in this great and aggravated wickedness. Some of the guard come into the city, to the priests, who had placed them at the sepulchre. They convene the council ; and, when they had consulted together, *they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye that his disciples came by night, and stole him away whilst we slept.* It is a studied falsehood, contrived by the chief priests and rulers, when assembled together. Justly did our Lord reprove the hypocrisy of these men ; how must irreligion and baseness, and every evil thing, prevail and spread among a people that are under such rulers and instructors !

2. “ This history may put us upon our guard against every temptation to a known falsehood, and make us very apprehensive of a lie.

“ We know not what may be the consequence : the mischief is oftentimes wide and durable. We may say, that the mischief of some lies, is infinite and without end. The bad effect of this lie of the soldiers is dreadful to think of. It was the occasion of the unbelief of many of the Jewish people at that time, which also affected their posterity, and more persons than we can distinctly apprehend, “ *This saying,*” says St. Matthew, “ *is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*” This lie was cherished and propagated by many for justifying their own infidelity, and for hardening others against the testimony of Christ’s apostles, and the evidence of the many miracles wrought by him.

“ Every man knows when he utters a lie ; for it is something contrary to his own inward persuasion : but he may not be always able to foresee the consequences. The soldiers knew the falsehood of what they said : but they did not duly consider the issue of this calumny upon the disciples. We, now, can better perceive it than they did, when they were first drawn into this prevarication. This, therefore, may increase our dread of a lie. We know it is not innocent ; we feel it to be contrary to our own conviction : but it may be worse than we are aware of, and may have consequences which we are not aware of.” *

WE have now finished the exposition of the gospel of Matthew. It is not my intention to go through all the other evangelists in the same manner : for their histories are so like his, that it would be only to explain the same thing a second time. Mark, in particular, follows the language and order of Matthew, with so little variation, that some have supposed his history to be nothing more than an abridgement of Matthew, or the same history, but reduced to a smaller compass, by the omission of some circumstances. I see no reason, however, for adopting this opinion : on the contrary.

I think I perceive in him numerous marks of a separate and independent history. But, deriving his information from the same sources as Matthew, in general, the history which he has written is very like his, and affords us a strong confirmation of the account given by the other evangelists, from which it differs only in such slight circumstances as appear in authentic histories of the same events, written by different persons. In Luke and John, particularly the latter, there are several things, which are not to be found in the other evangelists, and which furnish us with much useful instruction: to these I shall, therefore, next proceed.—I cannot, however, leave Matthew without observing, that there is nothing hitherto in the history of Jesus Christ, except his miraculous powers, which would lead one to suppose that he was any thing more than a man. Not the smallest intimation is given, that he was God, or a pre-existent spirit occupying a human body: the very few passages which have been supposed to look this way, being easily explained upon different principles. Yet, if Jesus Christ really was God, or a pre-existent being, it is very extraordinary and unaccountable that Matthew, who wrote the history of his life, should have omitted to inform us of these important circumstances; for he wrote what he considered as a complete Gospel which should contain every thing relating to Jesus Christ, which it was proper for us to know.—Surely, of these articles, which hold so conspicuous a place in modern creeds, the apostles and evangelists had no knowledge!









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